REBUILDING READING
Report of the
POVERTY COMMISSION

www.RebuildingReading.org   *March 2011*

" The test of our progress is not whether we add to the abundance of those who have much. It is whether we provide enough to those who have little."

– Franklin D. Roosevelt

This report is dedicated to the people of Reading who for decades—indeed, centuries—have meet life's challenges with creative and energetic determination, and whose spirited resilience is still their most powerful resource.

With special thanks to Mayor Tom McMahon and his staff, and to the dozens of hardworking volunteers who gave their time, energy and wisdom to this effort.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Rebuilding Reading Commission was established in October 2009 at the request of Mayor Tom McMahon to address poverty in Reading, where an estimated 35% of city residents live at or below the federal poverty line. Reading is the sixth poorest city in the nation among cities with populations of 65,000 or greater.

Chaired by Stephen A. Glassman, the Commission met monthly at Reading City Hall throughout its yearlong mission, often with expert guest speakers. The hard work of researching the issues in depth and coming to consensus on recommendations was done within our four committees—**Economic Development, Housing, Education,** and **Policy and Governance**—which also met at least once a month. In July 2010, the Commission published its mid-year report and held two well-attended town hall meetings to gather feedback from the community. Participation has been open to all, and to date an estimated 150 citizens have joined in the effort. Many have known poverty first-hand. All are volunteers.

This document is a prescriptive manual, with step-by-step instructions on how to alleviate poverty in Reading. Our twenty-one core proposals include a mix of those that can be implemented at modest cost within the next six to 18 months, and others designed to invest longer-term in quality of life improvements for low-income residents. Each recommendation has an action plan, success indicators to track outcomes, and at least one best practice that has been successfully implemented in other communities. Contact information for responsible parties and experts is included in an Appendix, as well as extensive reference documentation.

Like the effects of poverty itself, many of our recommendations are interlocking. Most also involve broad-based, culturally diverse coalitions, for we must use our resources wisely, with all stakeholders, public and private, working together on the shared mission of reducing poverty. For this reason, the Rebuilding Reading Poverty Commission further recommends

- Extensive, data-driven research to learn the true complexities of poverty in our city and inform a more analytical dialogue utilizing the resources of academic institutions and national non-profits such as Social Compact which do demographic analysis that adds to and corrects incomplete census data on a neighborhood and block-by-block level

- Ongoing leadership to monitor, sustain and communicate the progress of the poverty initiatives outlined in this report.

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ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The most direct path out of poverty is through jobs--good jobs, with family-sustaining wages and benefits--so the creation of such jobs is Reading's foremost challenge in addressing poverty in the city. Entrepreneurs are the key, for they start the small businesses that offer the jobs that provide people with the wherewithal to lift themselves and their families out of poverty.

1. Prioritize economic and community development. The city must take steps to foster a culture of entrepreneurship that supports the use of innovation and native resources to create businesses within our local economy, including:

- Appointment of an Economic and Community Development Advisory Board

- Creation of a comprehensive Economic and Community Development Plan with specific targets, goals, responsibilities, and timelines

- Expansion of the "one-stop shop" for entrepreneurs in City Hall

2. Improve quality of place. The city of course must be clean and safe, but a welcoming environment is one that is also easy to navigate, with a vibrant look and feel reflective of the population that is instinctively attractive to entrepreneurs, residents and visitors.

3. Create a small business incubator in downtown Reading. A small business incubator focused on minority owned, start-up and emerging businesses should be established in the heart of Reading, readily accessible to potential entrepreneurs, highly visible to pedestrians, and in a position to add momentum to an area of the city where small business growth is beginning to take root.

4. Expand industry partnerships for workforce development. We recommend the expansion, promotion and collaboration of affordable workforce development programs that teach the skill sets required for family-sustaining jobs in Reading and Berks County.

5. Develop an authentic, effective marketing plan for Reading. Reading needs a comprehensive, multi-faceted marketing plan that brands the city as a multicultural destination, highlights its unique cultural diversity as beneficial to business, allocates resources for permanent multicultural projects that energize our neighborhoods, and promotes thinking/buying locally.

HOUSING

Our housing recommendations are designed to increase the safety and value of the city's housing stock, foster home-ownership and community connectedness, and break down prejudices against the poor that have undermined previous efforts to improve housing conditions.

1. Focus on neighborhoods with maximum potential for success. Housing revitalization efforts must be focused on target neighborhoods adjacent to stable, well maintained housing, where the cycle of disinvestment is not yet entrenched and where targeted efforts can have a quick, visible impact on the neighborhood—improving their weakest aspects while preventing further decline and property abandonment.

2. Engage city residents as partners in neighborhood-driven revitalization. Community partners in each target neighborhood must work together to develop a comprehensive neighborhood development strategy that addresses housing, commercial district revitalization, economic development, cultural attractions and transportation.

3. Transform vacant properties with a Community Land Trust. The Community Land Trust will acquire vacant and abandoned property, market properties to individuals and nonprofit entities that will rehabilitate or redevelop it consistent with community-driven neighborhood plans, enable the community to take advantage of future opportunities and changes in the city planning process, and assemble obsolete and deteriorated property and vacant land into larger parcels suitable for redevelopment.

4. Incentivize home ownership and rehabilitation. The Reading Housing Authority should work with the Berks Community Action Programs, Inc. (BCAP) to facilitate the use of Family Savings Accounts for tenants. Home ownership and home maintenance training should be offered to all new homeowners by Neighborhood Housing Services.

5. Create a Housing Panel to streamline and coordinate revitalization. A Housing Panel is needed to streamline procedures, mentor new homeowners and help them obtain grants or low-interest loans to repair and renovate their properties, and identify impediments to private investment. A GIS-linked property information system must also be implemented to attract developers, monitor all real estate transactions, improve the accuracy and consistency of ongoing reassessments, and facilitate code enforcement.

6. Conduct systematic, professional, proactive inspection of all rental properties. The Property Maintenance Division of Codes Enforcement, in cooperation with the Building/Trades Division of Code Enforcement and the Blighted Property Review Committee, should develop a systematic inspection schedule in which all residential properties within a subsection of the city will be the focus of a coordinated and timely inspection effort by these departments every five years.

EDUCATION

Improving education may not immediately reduce poverty, but it is indisputably one of the most important strategies for decreasing community risks factors and increasing resilience and economic well being in the long term. Some of our recommendations address immediate crises such as truancy, violence, and illiteracy in Reading, while others focus on longer-term investments such as early childhood development. But all share the perspective that education is critical--from cradle to college or vocational school to career--and the conviction that there must be widely shared responsibility for both problems and solutions.

1. Ensure accountability and efficiency through cooperation, collaboration and financial transparency. A community-wide Education Summit should be convened no later than early March 2011, hosted by Alvernia University's Holleran Center for Community Engagement and including all stakeholders in the education process in Reading. Goals:

- Identification of shared objectives and opportunities for collaboration

- mapping of programs and services provided by all community education partners that reveals redundancies, inefficiencies and waste

- Transparent accounting of all public funding related to education, and the establishment of an ongoing system for financial transparency, including expert review of the chart of accounts

- Development of a "dashboard" tool enabling all education partners to monitor funding, expenditures and investments, indicators of graduation, truancy and dropout rates, teacher turnover, cultural competency training programs, consistent disciplinary actions, equal opportunity for both students and teachers in education, advancement and evaluation, and other important factors

2. Reduce extreme truancy and dropout rates. We recommend the funding, development and implementation of evidence-based programs to identify and intervene with students at risk of dropping out, data systems to track dropout prevention program implementation and program outcomes, and meaningful alternatives to adjudication and truancy fines.

3. Reduce and prevent violence in school and community. The Reading School District and the City of Reading must work much more actively and collaboratively with the community to develop school climate standards, anti-bullying and resiliency-building programs, and positive behavior support programs.

4. Increase parental engagement with a continuum of academic, family, and community supports. We recommend the support and community-wide promotion of parental engagement programs including the Reading Opportunity Center for Children (ROCC), the Parent Academy and Family Literacy programs at ROCC, the Baby College Program hosted by United Way, the Parent Outreach Advocates program and United Community Services.

5. Start early with language/literacy, cultural diversity and the arts. Language/literacy, cultural diversity, and the arts should be infused into curricula at the earliest levels. ESL and ELL programs must also be offered with an appropriate level of staff support, coordinated and publicized to Reading youth and adults in numbers appropriate to the needs of those enrolled in the school system. Programs for parents with limited English speaking and comprehension skills should be offered to enhance parental involvement in academic conferences, extra curricular activities, and volunteer support efforts.

6. Enhance academic and work readiness. The Reading School District must increase and formalize relationships with local companies and institutions of higher education to identify the skill and knowledge sets needed for competitive post-secondary readiness.

POLICY AND GOVERNANCE

These recommendations are addressed to City Hall and designed to achieve fundamental changes in the way we do business in Reading. Implemented effectively, they will dramatically improve, in the immediate and long term, not only city services but the quality of life in the community at large.

1. Improve fast-tracking, standardization and accountability of city services
The City of Reading must establish and execute a comprehensive quality management system (QMS) that reaches throughout all city operations. We also recommend a competent and fair-minded evaluation of all existing boards, commissions, and advisory committees to the Mayor and City Council to reduce duplication of efforts and to demand accountability of all appointees.

2. Reorient the city procurement and hiring preference towards city businesses and residents. To build a healthy local economy filled with thriving small businesses and family-sustaining jobs. the City of Reading should make both procurement of goods and services from local businesses and hiring of workers from the local workforce a priority.

3. Restructure the city's public finance system to reduce regressivity and incentivize economic growth. The City of Reading should phase out its current mix of Act 511 taxes over a five-year period and replace the revenue with a land value tax.

4. Build sustainability into city infrastructure and services to protect against commodity price shocks and foster a green economy. The City of Reading must make sustainable development a priority to protect its population against price shocks, particularly in food and energy costs, from unpredictable economic cycles, climate change, and other powerful forces that will challenge communities in the coming years.

"We will neglect our cities to our peril, for in neglecting them we neglect the nation."

--John F. Kennedy

"Lo que prueba nuestro progreso no es si añadimos a la abundancia de los que tienen mucho, sino si proveemos suficiente a quienes tienen poco."

– Franklin D. Roosevelt

Comisión para la Reconstrucción de Reading

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SUMARIO EJECUTIVO

La Comisión para la Reconstrucción de Reading fue establecida en octubre de 2009, a solicitud del Alcalde Tom McMahon, para tratar el asunto de la pobreza en Reading. Se estima que el 35% de los residentes de la Ciudad viven bajo del nivel de la pobreza, según delimitado por el gobierno federal. Reading es la ciudad más pobre en Pennsylvania y la sexta más pobre en la Nación.

Presidida por Stephen A. Glassman, la Comisión se reunió mensualmente en el Ayuntamiento de Reading para completar esta misión de un año de duración. Frecuentemente, se contó con la colaboración de oradores invitados durante las reuniones. Cuatro comités estuvieron involucrados en los esfuerzos de investigación profunda respecto a este asunto, y llegaron a un consenso en cuanto a recomendaciones. Estos comités fueron los de: **Desarrollo Económico, Vivienda, Educación, y Política y Gobierno,** que también se reunieron por lo menos una vez al mes. En julio de 2010, la Comisión publicó un reporte de mediados de año y realizó dos exitosas reuniones públicas para recopilar los comentarios de la comunidad.

La participación en este proyecto ha permanecido abierta para toda la comunidad. Hasta la fecha, aproximadamente 150 ciudadanos se han unido voluntariamente al esfuerzo. Muchos de ellos han conocido a la pobreza de cerca.

Este documento es un manual normativo con instrucciones paso a paso para aliviar el asunto de la pobreza en Reading. Nuestras veintiún propuestas clave incluyen una mezcla de aquellas que pueden ser implementadas a un módico costo dentro de los próximos seis a dieciocho meses, y las demás están designadas a invertir en mejoras a largo plazo en la calidad de vida de los residentes de escasos recursos. Cada recomendación incluye un plan de acción, medidas para trazar su éxito y evaluar resultados, y ejemplos de modelos a seguir implementados exitosamente en otras comunidades. En los Apéndices se incluye la información de contacto de expertos y de las partes responsables en la implementación de estos modelos, así como extensivas referencias.

Al igual que los efectos de la pobreza, muchas de nuestras recomendaciones están entrelazadas. Además, muchas involucran una amplia gama de coaliciones culturalmente diversas, pues debemos utilizar nuestros recursos sabiamente y procurar que todas las partes implicadas, así como el sector público y el privado laboren en conjunto en la misión compartida de reconstruir a la Ciudad. Por esta razón, la Comisión para la Reconstrucción de Reading recomienda:

- Efectuar una investigación extensiva basada en datos, para descubrir las verdaderas complejidades de la pobreza en nuestra Ciudad. Es necesario darle forma a un diálogo analítico, haciendo uso de las instituciones académicas y las organizaciones sin fines de lucro a nivel nacional, tales como "Social Compact", que realiza análisis demográficos acerca de vecindarios, cuadra por cuadra, para corregir o añadir a información incompleta en el Censo.

- Establecer un liderazgo continuo para monitorear, justificar y comunicar el progreso de las iniciativas para aliviar la pobreza, según señaladas en este reporte.

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DESARROLLO ECONÓMICO

La ruta más directa para salir de la pobreza se traza a través de la creación de empleos (de buenas oportunidades con sueldos y beneficios capaces de mantener a las familias), así que la creación de tales empleos es el reto primordial de Reading para hacerse cargo de la pobreza en la Ciudad. Los empresarios son clave, pues ellos inician los pequeños negocios con oportunidades de empleo, que a su vez proveen a las personas los medios para superarse y sacar a sus familias de la pobreza.

1. Otorgarle prioridad al desarrollo económico y comunitario. La Ciudad debe tomar las medidas para fomentar una cultura de empresarios que apoye el uso de recursos innovadores y originales del área, para crear comercios dentro de nuestra economía local, incluyendo:

- Designar una Junta de Asesoría para el Desarrollo Económico y Comunitario

- Crear un Plan de Desarrollo Económico y Comunitario comprensivo, con objetivos específicos, metas, responsabilidades y fechas límite

- Expandir en el Ayuntamiento las oportunidades para que los empresarios creen "one-stop-shops" (tiendas de una sola parada)

2. Mejorar la calidad de la Ciudad. Desde luego que la Ciudad debe ser limpia y segura, pero una atmósfera invitante es una fácil de navegar, con un estilo vibrante y una sensación representativa de la población; que sea atractiva instintivamente a los empresarios, residentes y visitantes.

3. Crear una incubadora para pequeños negocios en el casco de Reading. Se debería establecer en el corazón de Reading una incubadora para pequeños negocios, enfocada en los negocios emergentes operados por minorías y accesible para los empresarios potenciales, pero también visible para los peatones. La incubadora debería establecerse en una ubicación que pueda ofrecerle impulso a un área de la Ciudad donde el crecimiento de los pequeños negocios esté comenzando a enraizarse.

4. Expandir los fideicomisos en la industria para el desarrollo de la fuerza laboral. Recomendamos la expansión, promoción y colaboración de programas de desarrollo asequibles para la fuerza laboral, capaces de enseñar las destrezas requeridas para empleos con el potencial de mantener familias en Reading y el Condado de Berks.

5. Desarrollar un plan de mercadeo auténtico y efectivo para Reading. Reading necesita un plan de mercadeo comprensivo y multifacético que promueva a la Ciudad como un destino multicultural; que destaque su diversidad cultural como beneficiosa para el comercio y que designe recursos para fomentar proyectos permanentes multiculturales que energicen nuestros vecindarios. También debe promover un pensamiento hacia invertir localmente.

VIVIENDA

Nuestras recomendaciones para la vivienda están diseñadas para incrementar el valor y la seguridad del mercado de viviendas en la Ciudad, fomentar la propiedad de viviendas y la conectividad comunitaria, y reconocer los prejuicios en contra de las personas que viven en la pobreza. Estos prejuicios han debilitado esfuerzos previos por mejorar las condiciones del mercado.

1. Enfocarse en los vecindarios con el mayor potencial de éxito. Los esfuerzos de revitalización de la vivienda deben enfocarse en vecindarios relativamente estables, con casas en buenas condiciones, donde el ciclo de la desinversión aún no esté demasiado arraigado y donde los esfuerzos señalados tengan un impacto rápido y visible en el vecindario, con tal de mejorar sus debilidades mientras se previenen el decaimiento futuro y el abandono de propiedades.

2. Involucrar a los residentes de la Ciudad como socios en una revitalización liderada por los vecindarios. Los socios comunitarios en cada uno de los vecindarios selectos deberán laborar en conjunto para desarrollar estrategias de desarrollo comprensivas, dedicadas hacia asuntos relacionados con la vivienda, la revitalización del distrito comercial, el desarrollo económico, las atracciones culturales y la transportación.

3. Transformar las propiedades vacantes con un Fideicomiso Comunitario de Tierras. El Fideicomiso Comunitario de Tierras adquirirá propiedades vacantes y abandonadas. Además, mercadeará las propiedades hacia individuos y entidades sin fines de lucro con el potencial de rehabilitar y re-urbanizarlas, en consistencia con planes de vecindarios dirigidos por la comunidad. Este Fideicomiso permitirá que la comunidad tome ventaja de oportunidades futuras y cambios en el proceso de planificación de la Ciudad, y transformará propiedades obsoletas y terrenos vacantes en parcelas adecuadas para el re-desarrollo.

4. Incentivar la propiedad de viviendas y la rehabilitación. La Autoridad para la Vivienda de Reading debería trabajar con los programas de Berks Community Action, Inc. (BCAP) para facilitar el uso de Cuentas de Ahorro Familiares para los inquilinos. Se debe ofrecer adiestramiento a través de Neighborhood Housing Services en cuanto a la propiedad de viviendas y su mantenimiento, para todos los nuevos dueños de hogar.

5. Crear un Grupo o Panel para la Vivienda, para agilizar y coordinar la revitalización. El Panel para la Vivienda es necesario para agilizar los procedimientos y para servir como mentor de los nuevos propietarios y ayudarles a obtener subvenciones o préstamos a bajo interés para reparar y renovar sus propiedades, e identificar obstáculos en la inversión privada. Un sistema de información de la propiedad vinculado a "GIS" también debe ser implementado para atraer a los desarrolladores, monitorear todas las transacciones de bienes raíces, mejorar la precisión y la coherencia de las reevaluaciones en curso, y facilitar la aplicación de códigos.

6. Llevar a cabo una inspección sistemática, profesional y proactiva de todas las propiedades para la renta. La División de Aplicación de Códigos para el Mantenimiento de la Propiedad, en cooperación con la División de Aplicación de Códigos en Construcción/Comercio y el Comité de Revisión de Propiedades en Ruina, deberían desarrollar un itinerario de inspecciones sistemáticas mediante el cual todas las propiedades residenciales dentro de una subsección de la Ciudad sean el foco de esfuerzos de inspección coordinados y oportunos cada cinco años, por parte de estos departamentos.

EDUCACIÓN

Mejorar la educación no necesariamente reducirá la pobreza de inmediato, pero indisputablemente es una de las estrategias más importantes para disminuir los factores de riesgo en la comunidad y para incrementar su capacidad de recuperación y economía a largo plazo. Algunas de nuestras recomendaciones se enfocan en crisis inmediatas, tales como el absentismo, la violencia y el alfabetismo en Reading, mientras que otras se enfocan en inversiones a largo plazo, tales como las iniciativas de desarrollo durante la niñez temprana. Sin embargo, todas las recomendaciones comparten la perspectiva de que la educación es esencial desde la cuna hasta la universidad o los colegios vocacionales, y reconocen que debe existir una responsabilidad ampliamente compartida, tanto de los problemas como las soluciones.

1. Asegurar la fiabilidad y la eficiencia a través de la cooperación, colaboración y transparencia financiera. Se deberá coordinar una conferencia comunitaria sobre el tema de la educación, a no más tardar de marzo de 2011. La Berks County Community Foundation será anfitriona de esta reunión, incluyendo a las partes involucradas en la educación en Reading. Las metas son:

- Identificar objetivos compartidos y oportunidades de colaboración

- Trazar programas y servicios provistos por todos los socios comunitarios vinculados con la educación, que revele redundancias, ineficiencias y desperdicios

- Mostrar transparencia en el uso de fondos públicos para la educación y establecer un sistema continuo para esta transparencia, incluyendo la revisión de las tablas de contabilidad por parte de un experto

- Desarrollar una herramienta al estilo "panel de control", para permitir que los socios en la educación monitoreen el financiamiento, las inversiones y gastos, los indicadores de graduación, las cifras de absentismo y deserción escolar, el desempeño de los maestros, los programas de adiestramiento disponibles para la competitividad cultural, la consistencia en las acciones disciplinarias, la igualdad de oportunidades en la educación tanto para maestros como para estudiantes, el aprovechamiento académico y los métodos de evaluación, así como otros factores.

2. Reducir el absentismo extremo y la tasa de deserción escolar. Recomendamos la financiación, el desarrollo y la implementación de programas basados en evidencia para identificar e intervenir con los estudiantes en riesgo de desertar la escuela. Esto se llevaría a cabo a través de los sistemas de registro de esta data y de la implementación de programas de prevención y medición de resultados, así como a través de alternativas significativas para la adjudicación de multas vinculadas al absentismo escolar.

3. Reducir y prevenir la violencia en la escuela y la comunidad. El Distrito Escolar de Reading debe laborar más

activa y colaborativamente con la comunidad para desarrollar estándares en la atmósfera escolar; para establecer programas en contra de la intimidación ("bullying"), la creación de capacidad y programas que apoyen comportamientos positivos.

4. Incrementar la participación de los padres en una convergencia de apoyo académico y familiar. Recomendamos la promoción de programas para involucrar a los padres a través de la comunidad, incluyendo el Centro de Oportunidades de Reading para los Niños (ROCC, por sus siglas en inglés), los programas Academia para Padres y Alfabetismo Familiar, el Programa "Baby College" auspiciado por United Way, y el programa "Parent Outreach Advocates", de United Community Services.

5. Comenzar temprano con el alfabetismo en el lenguaje, la diversidad cultural y las artes. El lenguaje, el alfabetismo, la diversidad cultural y las artes deberían ser infundidos en el currículo escolar desde etapas tempranas. Los programas de ESL (inglés como segundo idioma) y ELL (aprendices del idioma inglés) también deberían ser ofrecidos con un nivel apropiado de apoyo profesional, coordinados y mercadeados hacia la juventud y adultos en Reading, consonantemente con las necesidades de aquellos inscritos en el sistema escolar. Los padres con destrezas limitadas en el habla y la comprensión del inglés deberían recibir la opción de mejorar su participación en conferencias académicas, actividades extracurriculares y esfuerzos de apoyo al voluntariado.

6. Mejorar la preparación académica y laboral. El Distrito Escolar de Reading debe incrementar y formalizar las relaciones con compañías e instituciones locales relacionadas con la educación superior, para identificar las destrezas y conocimiento necesarios para la preparación en el competitivo mercado de la educación superior.

POLÍTICA Y GOBIERNO

Las siguientes recomendaciones van dirigidas al Ayuntamiento y están diseñadas para alcanzar cambios fundamentales en la manera en que hacemos negocios en Reading. Si se implementan efectivamente, mejorarán dramáticamente (de inmediato y a largo plazo) no sólo los servicios de la Ciudad, sino la calidad de vida de la comunidad en general.

1. Mejorar la rapidez, la estandarización y la fiabilidad de los servicios de la Ciudad. La Ciudad de Reading debe establecer y ejecutar un sistema de manejo de calidad comprensivo (QMS, por sus siglas en inglés), que llegue a todas las operaciones de la Ciudad. También recomendamos una evaluación justa y competente de todas las juntas, comisiones, y comités de asesoría al Alcalde existentes, así como el Consejo de la Ciudad, para reducir la duplicidad de esfuerzos y para reclamar fiabilidad de parte de todos los representantes.

2. Reorientar la preferencia de adquisición de personal y reclutamiento en la Ciudad hacia los residentes de la Ciudad y comercios locales. Para construir una economía local saludable, repleta de pequeños negocios exitosos y de oportunidades de empleo con la capacidad de mantener familias, la Ciudad de Reading debería adquirir bienes y servicios de parte de los comercios locales, y reclutar a trabajadores de la fuerza laboral local debería ser prioridad.

3. Reestructurar el sistema de finanzas públicas de la Ciudad para reducir la regresión financiera e incentivar el crecimiento económico. La Ciudad de Reading debe eliminar su combinación actual de la Ley 511 de impuestos durante un período de cinco años y sustituir los ingresos con un impuesto sobre el valor de la tierra.

4. Crear sostenibilidad en la infraestructura de la Ciudad y servicios para proveer protección contra el impacto en los precios de los productos básicos, y fomentar una economía "verde.' La Ciudad de Reading debe hacer del desarrollo sostenible una prioridad para proteger a su población contra las fluctuaciones en los precios, particularmente en los costos de los alimentos y la energía, y tomar en cuenta los ciclos económicos impredecibles, el cambio climático y otras fuerzas poderosas que desafiarán a las comunidades durante los próximos años.

"Abandonaremos a nuestras ciudades a nuestro riesgo, pues al abandonarlas abandonamos a la Nación."

– John F. Kennedy

INTRODUCTION

That our city is in trouble is well known. It's problems are complex and interwoven, but foremost among them is poverty, which in 2008 affected an estimated 35% of city residents.

A family of four is counted as poor if they have a combined annual income of $22,128. But this is far below what is needed for a decent living, because the Census Bureau still uses the outdated formula of three times the cost of a "thrifty food basket"—a model based on spending patterns in 1955 when the cost of food represented one-third of the average family's budget. Today, the average family spends only about one-tenth of its income on food, since housing, childcare, and health care costs have all risen disproportionately during the last 55 years. More accurate measures are currently in development, but even measured by the current standard, at least 27,000 people in our city do not have enough income to make ends meet, and the true number is probably much higher. A revised census analysis of Reading's 2010 population will almost certainly reveal a dramatic undercount as has already become evident in the City of Miami where the census numbers were revised upward by more than 15% through the work of Social Compact.

Measured by the current federal poverty standard, at least 27,000 people in our city do not have enough income to make ends meet, and the true number is probably much higher.

In Reading, a very high poverty rate combines with very low housing and other living costs, systemic government inefficiencies and reduced funding and staffing, as well as an eroding tax base due to a poor business climate and weak job market. Now, as a financially distressed municipality under Act 47, Reading is additionally subject to a set of dramatic measures designed to balance the city's budget, raise revenues and cut costs.

"We are talking about strong medicine for a very sick city," said Dean A. Kaplan, coordinator for Reading's Act 47 Recovery Plan. Indeed, strong medicine is required, but to continue the metaphor, the patient must also be warm and well nourished to return to genuine good health. True recovery requires structural changes that prevent the city from reverting back to unsound and unsustainable practices. We can can do this. Our city, though poor, is rich in creativity,

determination, and the willingness of its people to engage once again in the process of rebuilding Reading.

THE COMMISSION

Chaired by Stephen A. Glassman, the Rebuilding Reading Commission was established in October 2009 at the request of Mayor Tom McMahon. Participation in the Rebuilding Reading Commission has been open to all, and more than 150 citizens have joined in the effort--economists as well as community organizers, attorneys, educators and architects, tenants, landlords and property owners, artists and business leaders, local entrepreneurs, public officials and private citizens.

We also had the benefit of expert guest speakers and advisors, including John Kromer, of the Fels Institute and former Director of the City of Philadelphia's Office of Housing and Community Development, now serving as Reading's Economic Development Coordinator; Bill Richardson, former Executive Director, Berks Community Action Program; economist Eron Lloyd; architect Bill Vitale; developer and South of Penn Neighborhood Association organizer Jim McHale; Blighted Property Review Committee member Wayne Bealer; nonprofit leadership consultant Annarose Ingarra-Milch; Allentown housing experts Ernie Atiyeh and Eric Weiss; urban revitalization consultant Christian Willauer; Robin Costenbader-Jacobson, president and CEO of Junior Achievement of Greater Reading and Lehigh Valley; attorney Joe Guillama, coordinator of community-based alternatives to juvenile detention; and Janis Risch, Executive Director of Good Schools Pennsylvania.

Additionally, we met with numerous elected and appointed officials, including U.S. Congressman Jim Gerlach; State Senator Michael O'Pake; State Representatives Sam Rohrer and Dante Santoni; Berks County Commissioners Mark Scott, Christian Leinbach and Kevin Barnhardt; Reading Mayor Tom McMahon; Director of Community Development Dan Robinson; Chief of Staff Frank Denbowski; Business Analyst David Kersley; and City Council members Vaughn Spencer, Donna Reed and Marcia Goodman-Hinnershitz.

OUR FINDINGS

Our research revealed widespread redundancy, waste and obstacles to progress, as well as unhappy disconnects between city residents and the city administration, neighborhoods and those striving for neighborhood improvement, families with children and the Reading School District, and between the needs of the city and those who

influence decision-making at the county level. For example:

- Despite initiatives to be more business-friendly, Reading is still perceived by many start-ups and existing business owners to be difficult and cumbersome with which to work

- Reading is home to people from more than 30 nations, each with their own unique and rich cultural heritage, yet this diversity is often disparaged or ignored

- Almost 1,500 of Reading's approximately 27,000 properties were vacant, according to a 2007 study

- In 2006, 46.9% of births in Reading were to mothers without a high school degree, and an estimated 70% of children entering kindergarten lacked one or more of the basic life skills needed to be successful in school

- The City needs to accelerate efforts to improve the effectiveness of nearly all municipal operations

Plenty of our findings were discouraging, especially in combination with the struggling economy. But while it is tempting to view severe poverty as an intractable problem, with causes beyond our control and solutions beyond our grasp, the Rebuilding Reading Poverty Commission chose to see the city as full of potential and our work as an opportunity for real change. This is an optimistic view—requiring strong leadership, good-faith teamwork and political will. But it is not unrealistic or naive, for effective solutions do exist and have been successfully employed in cities much like our own, in the Commonwealth and across the nation.

Other governments need to recognize that Reading is an integral part of the entire region's success, not an urban island whose success or failure has no bearing on its neighbors.

--*Act 47 Recovery Plan for Reading*

THE REBUILDING READING REPORT

Our report proposes solutions in four areas--Economic Development, Education, Housing, and Policy and Governance--that can be realistically implemented within five years. It is a manual, with step-by-step instructions, best practices that have been successfully implemented in other communities, contact information for identified experts, and metrics to track outcomes and provide accountability. Virtually all of our recommendations share these themes:

Better resource utilization, to remedy widespread inefficiencies in every facet of city government, and tap the power of creative collaboration

A welcoming environment for businesses, homeowners, residents and visitors, free from unnecessary obstacles to progress

Local focus/regional perspective, prioritizing local talent in hiring and procurement, and including regional approaches where appropriate, such as consolidated police forces and a transit system that responds to regional needs

Authentic, positive marketing that celebrates our successes and extraordinary diversity while acknowledging the contributions of those who have fueled the economic engine of Berks County for 300 years

Sustainability, by solving problems in ways that address not only our short-term needs but that simultaneously build the long-term health of the city

We are delighted that many of the recommendations included in the recent "Ride to Prosperity" report mirror our own, particularly support for innovation, entrepreneurship and workforce development. Our hope is that, with a strong working relationship with such groups whose focus is on Berks County as a whole, we may prompt a paradigm shift where everyone in the region recognizes our mutual interdependence. The Rebuilding Reading Commission is focused squarely on poverty in the city, but our recommendations will be only as effective as the support we get from partners at all levels. Without mutual understanding and cooperation between the city and surrounding communities, even the growth of Berks County is in jeopardy, for the county cannot isolate itself and go it alone.

The Rebuilding Reading report is no silver bullet, but it does suggest the first steps. Perhaps no other group has done such a thorough exploration of poverty in Reading, nor advocated on behalf of those affected by it. Extensive, data-driven research must still be done to learn the true complexities of the situation and inform a more analytical dialogue.

What we do know is that poverty means more than people--and municipalities--not having enough money to pay their bills. It is also a risk factor for other problems including poor academic achievement, inadequate job preparedness, and violence, which has flared up alarmingly in recent months. Moreover, people living in poverty are less able to defend themselves than those with more abundant resources, and this is especially true when poverty is complicated by other factors--including race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, and mental or physical disability--despite the city's anti-discrimination ordinance passed in October 2009.

Every problem magnifies the impact of the others, and all are so tightly interlocked that one reversal can produce a chain

reaction with results far distant from the original cause. A run-down apartment can exacerbate a child's asthma, which leads to a call for an ambulance, which generates a medical bill that cannot be paid, which ruins a credit record, which hikes the interest rate on an auto loan, which forces the purchase of an unreliable used car, which jeopardizes a mother's punctuality at work, which limits her promotions and earning capacity, which confines her to poor housing.

--*The Working Poor,* by David K Shipler

Any effort to increase the prosperity of our region must include representation from the tens of thousands of men, women and children living below the poverty threshold. It must advocate for them and empower them, plan for the improvement of their lives and include them in the decision-making process. Why? Because Reading is the heart of Berks County, and unlike Las Vegas, what happens here doesn't stay here.

We used to be home to the Reading Railroad, Vanity Fair and many other economic giants that fueled the growth and development of the region. We were also, like most cities, home to successive waves of immigrants--people who came here with little more than a desire to work hard and raise children whose lives might be better than their own. Virtually every immigrant family began their life here as marginalized people, reviled by those who had come before them, accused of sloth and irresponsibility, and their misfortunes used against them.

This old message was originally aimed at Germans, Italians and others--for example, by none other than Benjamin Franklin speaking in 1727 when the Pennsylvania assembly passed a law requiring all Palatines (German immigrants from the Palatine region of Germany) to take an Oath of Allegiance to the British Crown. "*Why should the Palatine boors be suffered to swarm into our settlements, and by herding together establish their language and manners to the exclusion of ours? Why should Pennsylvania founded by Englishmen suffer to become a colony of foreigners who shortly will be so numerous as to Germanize us instead of us Anglifying them.*"

Today this same insensitive message is often voiced against Latinos, African-Americans and Asians, and cited as an excuse for doing nothing to help. But when cities fail to thrive, crime, violence and poverty spread, just as, in better times, prosperity grows in cities and surrounding counties. In Philadelphia, there is no magic at City Line Avenue. Instability extends past that border like it does in Mt. Penn, Kenhorst,

Muhlenberg, West Reading, Wyomissing and other Reading suburbs. This trend will surely continue unless we work together to rebuild our city.

The perspective we endorse is not new, but it is often overlooked in the context of poverty. Our advocacy for those who are economically disadvantaged in Reading is simply an extension of a classic American value--freedom of opportunity. We can and we must "provide enough to those who have little." It makes good sense, not just for those who live in Reading, but for everyone in Berks County.

Finally, we are pleased to have met the challenge set by the Mayor to deliver an action-oriented report that specifies general timelines and sequential steps to take to achieve the worthwhile objectives in this report. The recommend action steps, while time-bound in their aspirations, are early estimates of what may be required once efforts commence with the various initiatives. A critical next step in the implementation of this plan will be careful planning and prioritization that aligns the City's available resources with the resources required to undertake the initiatives. These steps will involve a broad array of stakeholders upon whose commitment of time and resources our ultimate success | will rely.

Our hope is that, with a strong working relationship with groups whose focus is on Berks County as a whole, we may prompt a paradigm shift where everyone in the region recognizes our mutual interdependence.

INTRODUCCIÓN

Que nuestra Ciudad tiene problemas es bien sabido. Sus problemas son complejos y entrelazados, pero en primer lugar está el de la pobreza, que en el 2008 afectó aproximadamente a un 35% de los residentes de la Ciudad.

Una familia de cuatro personas se considera "pobre" si tienen un ingreso combinado anual de $22,128. Pero esto es mucho menos de lo que se necesita para vivir decentemente, porque el la Oficina del Censo aún utiliza una fórmula anticuada de tres veces el costo de una "canasta barata de comida" - un modelo basado en los patrones de gasto del 1955, cuando el costo de la comida representaba una tercera parte del presupuesto promedio de una familia. Hoy en día, una familia promedio gasta solamente alrededor de una décima parte de su ingreso en comida, ya que la vivienda, el servicio de guardería y los costos del cuidado de la salud han subido desproporcionadamente durante los últimos 55 años. La aplicación de medidas más exactas está actualmente en desarrollo, pero incluso si nos dejamos llevar por el estándar actual, por lo menos 27,000 personas en nuestra Ciudad no cuentan con los ingresos suficientes para satisfacer sus necesidades mínimas, y el número real probablemente es mucho mayor. Una revisión al Censo de Reading de 2010 seguramente revelará que los números son mayores, como se ha hecho evidente en la ciudad de Miami, en donde una revisión de las cifras del Censo demostró un aumento de más de 15%, gracias a la labor del "Social Compact".

Si nos dejamos llevar por el estándar federal de la pobreza actual, por lo menos 27,000 personas en nuestra Ciudad no tienen los ingresos suficientes para satisfacer sus necesidades mínimas, y el número real probablemente es mucho mayor.

En Reading, la alta tasa de la pobreza se combina con la vivienda asequible y otros bajos costos, las ineficiencias sistemáticas del gobierno y fondos y personal reducidos, así como una base tributaria erosionada debido al precario clima empresarial y al débil mercado laboral. Al presente, como ciudad afligida bajo el Proyecto de Ley 47, Reading está adicionalmente sujeta a un juego de medidas dramáticas, designadas a balancear el presupuesto de la Ciudad, incrementar los ingresos y reducir costos. "Hablamos de la necesidad de un poderoso remedio para una ciudad muy enferma," señaló Dean A. Kaplan, Coordinador para el Plan para la Recuperación de la Ciudad bajo el Proyecto de Ley 47. Ciertamente se requiere de un remedio poderoso pero, para continuar con haciendo uso de esta metáfora, para re-

cuperar la buena salud el paciente también debe estar bien abrigado y alimentado. La verdadera recuperación requiere de cambios estructurales que impidan que la Ciudad retorne hacia prácticas erróneas e insostenibles. Podemos lograrlo. Nuestra Ciudad, a pesar de ser pobre, es rica en creatividad, determinación y el empeño de sus ciudadanos por involucrarse una vez más en el proceso de reconstruir a Reading.

LA COMISIÓN

Presidida por Stephen A. Glassman, la Comisión para la Reconstrucción de Reading fue establecida en octubre de 2009 a petición del Alcalde Tom McMahon. La participación en la Comisión ha estado abierta a todos por igual. Más de 150 ciudadanos se unieron al esfuerzo, incluyendo organizaciones comunitarias, economistas, abogados, educadores, arquitectos, inquilinos, terratenientes, propietarios de vivienda, artistas, líderes empresariales, empresarios locales, oficiales públicos y ciudadanos.

También contamos con el privilegio de tener a oradores expertos y asesores invitados, incluyendo a John Kromer, del Fels Institute y antiguo Director de la Oficina para la Vivienda y el Desarrollo Comunitario de la ciudad de Philadelphia, que actualmente funge como Coordinador para el Desarrollo Económico de Reading; Bill Richardson, ex Director Ejecutivo del Programa para la Acción Comunitaria de Berks; al Economista Eron Lloyd; al Arquitecto Bill Vitale; al Constructor y Organizador de la Asociación South of Penn, Jim McHale; a Wayne Bealer, miembro del Comité de Revisión de Propiedades en Ruinas; Annarose Ingarra-Milch, consultora en liderazgo para organizaciones sin fines de lucro; Ernie Atiyeh y Eric Weiss, expertos de vivienda en Allentown; Christian Willauer, Consultor para la Revitalización Urbana; Robin Costenbader-Jacobson, Presidente y CEO del programa Junior Achievement de la Ciudad de Reading y el Lehigh Valley; el Licenciado Joe Guillama, Coordinador de Alternativas para Jóvenes en Detención; y Janis Risch, Directora Ejecutiva de Good Schools Pennsylvania.

Además, nos reunimos con varios oficiales electos y designados, incluyendo al Congresista Jim Gerlach; al Representante de Estado Sam Rohrer; a los Comisionados del Condado de Berks Mark Scott, Christian Leinbach y Kevin Bernhardt; al Senador Michael O'Pake; al Representante Dante Santoni; al Alcalde de la Ciudad de Reading, Tom McMahon; al Director para el Desarrollo Comunitario, Dan Robinson; al Jefe de Personal Frank Denbowski; al Analista de Negocios, David Kersley; y a los Concejales Vaughn Spencer, Donna Reed y Marcia Goodman-Hinnershitz.

NUESTROS HALLAZGOS

Nuestra investigación reflejó que existe una amplia duplicidad de servicios, desperdicios y obstáculos para el progreso, así como una triste falta de conexión entre los residentes de la Ciudad y su administración; los vecindarios y aquellos ansiosos porque sus comunidades mejoren; las familias con niños en el Distrito Escolar de Reading; las necesidades de la Ciudad y aquellos quienes influyen en la toma de decisiones a nivel Nacional. Por ejemplo:

- Reading es percibido tanto por negocios nuevos como por los ya establecidos como la Ciudad más obstruccionista del Estado

- Reading es el hogar de personas de más de 30 naciones: cada una con su cultura particular y herencia única. Sin embargo, la diversidad de la Ciudad es menospreciada e ignorada

- Casi 1,500 de las 27,000 propiedades de la Ciudad están vacantes, según un estudio realizado en el 2007

- En el 2006, el 46.9% de los nacimientos en Reading provinieron de madres que no habían terminado el cuarto año de escuela superior, y se estimó que el 70% de los niños que ingresaron al kindergarten carecían de una o más de las necesidades vitales básicas para ser exitosos en la escuela

- Los obstáculos para una ejecución eficiente de políticas – incluyendo la falta de una estandarización apropiada, rapidez, monitoreo y evaluación – son una carga para casi todas las operaciones de la Ciudad

Muchos de nuestros hallazgos fueron desalentadores, especialmente en combinación con la precaria economía, pero a pesar de que es tentador ver a la pobreza como a un problema incorregible con causas más allá de nuestro control y soluciones más allá de nuestro alcance, la Comisión para la Reconstrucción de Reading eligió ver a la Ciudad en su completo potencial y a nuestra labor como a una oportunidad para el cambio verdadero. Esta es una visión optimista que requiere de arduo liderazgo, trabajo en equipo de buena fe y voluntad política. Esto no es irrealista o ingenuo, pues las soluciones efectivas existen y han sido implementadas con éxito en ciudades muy similares a la nuestra, tanto en el Estado como a través de la Nación.

Otros gobiernos han reconocido que Reading es parte integral del éxito de la Región, y que no es una isla urbana en donde el éxito o el fracaso no tendrán efecto en sus vecinos.

Plan para la Reconstrucción de Reading, según el Proyecto de Ley 47

EL REPORTE PARA LA RECONSTRUCCIÓN DE READING

Nuestro reporte propone soluciones en cuatro áreas: Desarrollo Económico, Educación, Vivienda, Política y Gobierno, que pueden ser implementadas realísticamente en un período de cinco años. Es un manual con instrucciones paso a paso en cuanto a mejores prácticas que han sido implementadas con éxito en otras comunidades, con la información de contacto de expertos selectos, y con un sistema para medir los resultados y proveer fiabilidad. Virtualmente, todas nuestras recomendaciones comparten los siguientes temas: Una mejor utilización de recursos, para remediar las amplias ineficiencias en cada faceta del gobierno de la Ciudad y para alcanzar el poder de la colaboración creativa.

Un ambiente invitante para los negocios, los propietarios de vivienda, residentes y visitantes, libre de obstáculos innecesarios que impiden el progreso.
Un enfoque local/ perspectiva regional, para darle prioridad al talento local al momento de reclutar y buscar servicios. También se fomentará la inclusión de acercamientos regionales cuando sea apropiado, así como la consolidación de la policía y el sistema de tránsito en respuesta a las necesidades regionales.

Un mercadeo auténtico y positivo que celebra nuestros éxitos y nuestra diversidad, mientras toma en cuenta las contribuciones de aquellos que han energizado el motor de la economía en el Condado de Berks por 300 años.

La sostenibilidad, al resolver problemas en maneras que se dirigen no sólo hacia las necesidades a corto plazo, sino que simultáneamente crean una mejor salud para la Ciudad a largo plazo.

Nos complace reconocer que muchas de las recomendaciones incluidas en el reciente reporte "Ride to Prosperity" reflejan las nuestras, particularmente en el apoyo a la innovación y en el desarrollo de empresarios y fuerza laboral. Nuestra esperanza es que, mediante una fuerte relación de trabajo con grupos similares cuya atención se centra en el Condado de Berks, podamos provocar un cambio de paradigma mediante el cual todos en la región lleguen a reconocer nuestra interdependencia mutua. La Comisión para la Reconstrucción de Reading se centra de lleno en la pobreza de la Ciudad, pero nuestras recomendaciones sólo serán tan eficaces como el apoyo que recibamos de parte de socios en todos los niveles. Sin la comprensión mutua y la cooperación entre la Ciudad y las comunidades aledañas, incluso el crecimiento del Condado de Berks estará en peligro, pues el Condado no puede funcionar solo o aislado.

El reporte para la Reconstrucción de Reading no pretende ser una solución dorada, pero sugiere los primeros pasos a seguir. Ningún otro grupo ha logrado este acometido a través de la exploración de la pobreza en Reading y tampoco ha abogado a nombre de aquellos afectados por ella. Aún se debe hacer una investigación extensa apoyada en datos para aprender sobre la complejidad real de la situación e invitar a un diálogo más analítico. Lo que sí sabemos es que la

pobreza significa mucho más que personas - y municipios – que no tienen suficiente dinero para pagar sus cuentas. También es un factor de riesgo para otros problemas como el bajo rendimiento académico, la preparación inadecuada para el empleo y la violencia, que se ha intensificado de manera alarmante en los últimos meses. Por otra parte, las personas que viven en la pobreza son menos capaces de defenderse que quienes tienen más abundancia de recursos. Esto es especialmente cierto cuando la pobreza se complica por otros factores, entre ellos: raza, etnia, religión, orientación sexual, identidad de género y de salud mental o discapacidad física, a pesar de la ordenanza de la Ciudad emitida en octubre de 2009 en contra la discriminación.

Cada problema magnifica el impacto de los demás y todos se entrelazan tan firmemente que un revés podría producir una reacción en cadena con resultados muy distantes a la causa original. Un apartamento en malas condiciones puede exacerbar el asma de un niño, lo que conduce a llamar una ambulancia, que genera una cuenta médica que no podrá ser pagada, que arruina un expediente de crédito, lo que incrementa el tipo de interés en un préstamo para un auto, lo que fuerza a la compra de un coche usado no fiable, que compromete la puntualidad de una madre en su trabajo, lo que limita sus posibilidades de ascenso, restringiendo así su capacidad de aumentar sus ingresos, confinándola a una vida pobre.

"The Working Poor" (Los trabajadores pobres), por David K. Shipler

Cualquier esfuerzo por aumentar la prosperidad de nuestra región debe incluir la representación de las decenas de miles de hombres, mujeres y niños que viven por debajo del umbral de pobreza. Se debe abogar por ellos y darles el poder, el plan para mejorar sus vidas, e incluirles en el proceso de toma de decisiones. ¿Por qué? Debido a que Reading está en el corazón del Condado de Berks y a que, a diferencia de en Las Vegas, lo que pasa aquí no se queda aquí. Solíamos ser el hogar del ferrocarril de Reading, la revista Vanity Fair y muchos otros gigantes económicos que impulsaron el crecimiento y el desarrollo de la región. También fuimos, al igual que otras ciudades exitosas, el hogar de sucesivas oleadas de inmigrantes: personas que vinieron a ciudades como Reading con poco más que el deseo de trabajar fuertemente y de criar a sus hijos, con la fe de que sus vidas serían mejo-

res que las suyas. Virtualmente cada familia de inmigrantes comenzó su vida aquí como gente marginada, agraviados por quienes habían llegado primero que ellos, tildados de vagos e irresponsables, y su mala suerte fue utilizada en su contra. Este antiguo mensaje fue originalmente dirigido hacia los alemanes, italianos y otros, por nadie menos que Benjamin Franklin en su discurso de 1727, cuando la Asamblea de Pennsylvania aprobó una ley que requería a todos los inmigrantes alemanes tomar un Juramento de Alianza a la Corona Británica. "¿Por qué deberían los alemanes sufrir en nuestros asentamientos, y al juntarse establecer su lenguaje y costumbres y excluir los nuestros? ¿Por qué Pennsylvania, fundada por ingleses, debería sufrir convertirse en colonia de extranjeros, quienes dentro de poco serán tantos que nos querrán 'alemanizar', en lugar de ser 'anglosajonizados' por nosotros?"

Hoy día este mismo insensible mensaje es expresado en contra de los latinos, afroamericanos y asiáticos, y se cita como excusa para no hacer nada por ayudar. Pero cuando las ciudades dejan de prosperar, el crimen y la violencia se dispersan. De igual manera, en tiempos mejores la prosperidad crece en las ciudades y países circundantes. En Philadelphia no existe magia en City Line Avenue. La inestabilidad se extiende más allá de ese límite, tal como pasa en Mt. Penn, Kenhorst, Muhlenberg, West Reading, Wyomissing y otros suburbios de Reading. Esta modalidad seguramente continuará, a menos que trabajemos juntos en la reconstrucción de nuestra Ciudad.

La perspectiva que apoyamos no es nueva, pero a veces se le deja de lado en el contexto de la pobreza. Nuestra representación de aquellos en desventaja económica en Reading es simplemente una extensión de un valor clásico americano: la libertad de oportunidades. Podemos y debemos "proveer lo suficiente a quienes tienen poco". Hace sentido, no sólo para quienes viven en Reading, sino para todos en el Condado de Berks.

Nuestra esperanza es que, mediante una fuerte relación de trabajo con grupos similares, cuya atención se centra en el Condado de Berks, podamos provocar un cambio de paradigma en el que todos en la región lleguen a reconocer nuestra interdependencia mutua.

Economic Development

The most direct path out of poverty is through jobs--good jobs, with family-sustaining wages and benefits--so the creation of such jobs is Reading's foremost challenge in addressing poverty in the city. Entrepreneurs are the key, for they start the small businesses that offer the jobs that provide people with the wherewithal to lift themselves and their families out of poverty. As noted in *Reinventing Reading, a Comprehensive Vision and Framework for Revitalization*, "…we need to create an economic environment where new business opportunities can be quickly identified and captured, using an extensive network of public/private partnerships to effectively coordinate entrepreneur recruitment/training and business incubation."

But while successful cities find ways to support those willing to risk starting or expanding businesses, Reading is widely perceived to make it harder. Owners of large and small businesses alike, as well as entrepreneurs looking for a toe-hold in the city—virtually everyone who might contribute on the front lines of economic development— seems to finds obstacles in the form of burdensome paperwork, the need to with multiple departments with overlapping and even contradictory missions and requirements, and the shortage of funding and tax structures that might make their job easier. Very few people seem to know about important changes that have already been suggested or implemented by the city administration, indicating, at the very least, a lack of effective an opportunity to improve communication internally and to the public at large.

This is a complex problem with a long, tangled history unlikely to be resolved in the near future. But immediate steps can and must be taken, including supporting entrepreneurship, enhancing workforce development, and branding the city as a vibrant place to live and do business and an exciting, multicultural hub for regional residents and tourists alike.

We need to give much more focus on retaining jobs and helping existing local businesses grow as much as possible.

--*Ride to Prosperity: Strategies for Economic Competitiveness in Greater Reading*

1. Prioritize economic and community development

In addition to the admirable ongoing efforts to recruit and retain large businesses, the city must take steps to foster a culture of entrepreneurship that supports the use of innovation and native resources to create businesses within our local economy. This recommendation is similar to the call for "Entrepreneurship and Innovation" in the *Ride to Prosperity* report, and we strongly support the emphasis on long-term cultural change and targeted investments to improve the quality and availability of local business services. Berks County residents in general may be risk-averse, but Latinos are typically four times more likely to start businesses than other groups. This gives us reason to hope that with proper support, small business development might see tremendous growth in Reading.

- We applaud the appointment of John Kromer as Economic Development Coordinator and Dan Robinson as Community Development Director. With the help of an advisory board, they can be instrumental in creating a welcoming environment for business development, supporting contractual priority to local businesses, and procuring funds and legislative support for economic development programs. The **Economic and Community Development Advisory Board**, appointed jointly by the Mayor and City Council, should work with them to facilitate cooperation between entrepreneurs, existing businesses, public and private agencies, and all facets of government.

- A comprehensive **Economic and Community Development Plan** must be developed that includes all of the economic development recommendations in this report. revised every three years, it should also identify Neighborhood Commercial Community Areas, set priorities for the use of funds such as Community Development Block Grants (CDBG), and identify funding sources and incentive programs such as the Local Economic Development Revitalization Tax Assistance program (LERTA) and the Fund for Revitalization and Economic Development (FRED).

- A **"one-stop shop" in City Hall**--open during all working hours and some evenings and providing services in Spanish as well as English--must provide information on financing, technical assistance and government resources, including licensing and permits as well as incentives to attract new businesses to Reading.

Currently, City Hall offers these services only in English, and during very limited hours. The proposed one-stop shop must be widely publicized through a marketing campaign, in Spanish and English, that reaches entrepreneurs in Reading, Berks County and throughout the middle Atlantic and New England states. This campaign can be put into place immediately using social media and other Internet strategies, and should link to similar efforts by the Latino Chamber of Commerce, Greater Reading Chamber of Commerce, Sustainable Berks Business Network and various small business incubators.

Best Practices

Chattanooga CANDO" is a multi-year economic development initiative launched in 2003 by the Chattanooga (Tennessee) Area Chamber of Commerce. The first 4-year initiative was renewed in 2007 with the addition of a $10 million education program designed to improve the ability of area schools (kindergarten through college) to graduate well-prepared workers. Programs include workforce development, assistance to existing businesses and business incubation. Indexed resources, community statistics and demographics are available online for start-ups and small businesses, as well as contact information for consultants from the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga College of Business. A more recent plan, also developed by the Chamber, calls for the continued diversification of the local economy, which currently suffers from 10 percent unemployment. The new plan also recommends support for existing businesses that add local jobs, an enhanced focus on regionalism, and continuing efforts to bolster the workforce and education.

Action Plan

Month 1-2

- With Economic Development Coordinator John Kromer, City Council designates a Community and Economic Development Advisory Board

- Economic Development Coordinator, Community Development Director and Advisory Board create an Economic and Community Development Plan, including the one-stop shop

Month 3-6

- Plan is approved by city management and council

- Fundraising through grants and business partnerships

Month 7+

- Implementation of recommendations

Success Indicators

- Number of small business start-ups

- Growth of existing small businesses

- Use of one-stop shop in City Hall

- Additional outcomes identified in the plan

2. Improve quality of place

The city of course must be clean and safe, but a welcoming environment is one that is also easy to navigate, with a vibrant look and feel that is instinctively attractive to entrepreneurs, residents and visitors. We recommend the designation of **Neighborhood Commercial Community Areas** and public/private initiatives such as **Adopt a Block, Main Street and Elm Street programs**. Culturally diverse groups must be included in the decision-making process for all such economic development initiatives, including the Penn Street Corridor and El Mercado projects. Features of improved quality of place include:

- Minimal yellow lines near businesses to provide additional parking space for customers

- Increased number of parking spaces with 30% more time and one hour free parking for customers who shop downtown

- Additional street lights in residential and business neighborhoods

- Tree-trimming, street and sidewalk cleaning and landscape beautification

- Handicap-accessibility with consistent curb cuts, ramps, ADA-compliant bathrooms, etc.

Best Practices

West Reading, Lancaster and West Chester are excellent examples of cities that have improved their quality of place through these methods. In Reading itself, the South of Penn Neighborhood Association has taken enormous strides--largely with volunteer effort--to improve the vibrancy of the neighborhood.

With **Adopt a Block**, corporate organizations are requested to voluntarily direct their economic development initiatives--including the donation of funds as well as time for the beautification of Designation of Neighborhood Commercial Community Areas--to a specific city block.

The **Main Street Program** is a comprehensive, community-based revitalization approach developed by the National Trust for Historic Preservation in 1980. Communities apply four prescribed components--design, promotion, organization

and economic restructuring such as finding new or better purposes for Main Street enterprises. By recruiting new businesses to the city and helping existing downtown businesses expand in size, scope and number of locations, a successful Main Street Program converts unused space into productive property and sharpens the competitiveness of its businesses. Since "Main Streets" are surrounded by distressed neighborhoods--and most downtown revitalization programs (including Main Street) have had little impact beyond the borders of downtown--the **Elm Street Program** was created to strengthen the older historic neighborhoods that characterize many of the commonwealth's communities.

Action Plan

Month 1-3

- The Reading Area Parking Authority develops a plan that values revenue generation from downtown enterprises and supports the vision set forth by the Economic and Community Development Plan

- City of Reading, United Way, Weed & Seed, Met-Ed and diverse community partners collaborate on a plan consistent with the Economic and Community Development Plan

- City engineer should develop and implement a Master Plan that will establish certain lighting requirements for each business district within Reading as per the designated Neighborhood Commercial Community Areas outlined by the Economic and Community Development Plan. In addition City Engineer should develop a maintenance plan that requires every tree to be trimmed appropriately on an annual basis

Month 4-12

- Reading Area Parking Authority, City of Reading, United Way, Weed & Seed, Met Ed and diverse community partners work together to implement parallel plans

Success Indicators

- Increased business traffic and increased length of stay

- Number of street lights in residential and business neighborhoods

- Number of new urban-appropriate trees; removal of inappropriate trees

- ADA-compliance

-

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Regional economic growth is highly correlated with the presence of many small, entrepreneurial employers—not a few big ones.

--Edward L. Glaeser and William R. Kent, *Harvard Business Review*

3. Create a small business incubator in downtown Reading

To increase the number of new business opportunities in Reading, we recommend the creation of a business incubator focused on minority owned, start-up and emerging businesses. This can be a private for-profit entrepreneurial endeavor, a non-profit managed project, or a public sector/ Reading government sponsored initiative.

Among the Act 47 Community Committee Economic Development Recommendations is the promotion of "more economic development in the city, including developing small and minority-owned Reading business…" The majority Hispanic population gives the city a distinct advantage here, because the growth rate of the Commonwealth's Hispanic-owned firms is nine percent higher than the national average and more than three times the state average for all businesses and is steadily becoming a significant and critical segment of the Commonwealth's workforce.

The incubator would support the transformational strategies of the Downtown 20/20 Initiative, the 2010 *Ride to Prosperity* report--"where residents are more prosperous, businesses are more innovative and faster growing, opportunity is available to all, and long-term residents and newcomers are happy to live"-- and the Initiative for a Competitive Greater Reading (ICGR) report, which recommended leveraging the inner city as an asset by encouraging young inner-city residents to become entrepreneurs.

The proposed business incubator should be a designated multi-tenant, commercial site providing a mix of business assistance services and shared office resources. The location of this incubator is critical: it must be readily accessible to potential entrepreneurs and in a position to add momentum to an area of the City where small business growth is beginning to take root. The incubator would also serve as a self-marketing tool for other entrepreneurs and potential customers. Thus, the **incubator should be housed in a highly visible and easily accessible street-level commercial site located either on or directly off Penn Street** thereby furthering the Penn Corridor Initiative and the work of the Greater Reading Berks Economic Partnership (BEP). It would complement the Berks County Community Foundation and Kutztown University Small Business Development Center recently launched "Business Jump Start Center", located on the top floor of the foundation's office building.

In addition to the technical assistance offered by the incubator, a micro-lending program or Micro+ loan program, as noted in ICGR report, is also recommended. Raising capital is a challenge for any entrepreneurial venture, and micro-lending programs have proven invaluable to the creation of vibrant business communities. Reading can enhance the growth of small businesses through the creation and expansion of micro business-financing programs through local lenders and other government sources.

Best Practices

The failure rate for new businesses is approximately 50% within 5 years. In contrast, the National Business Incubation Association (NBIA) reports that 87% of all firms that have graduated from incubators are still in business. Business incubation programs play an important role in stimulating economic growth in local communities by providing a broad range of needed business services and assistance to young firms at their earliest stages of development--when they are most vulnerable.

Close to home, Business Jump Start Center, Reading, Ben Franklin Technology Partners, of NE PA, CanBe incubator, Hazelton and BASE Inc, Lancaster are non-profit models. Base Inc. is located in a PA Keystone Opportunity Zone (KOZ). It was founded in 1996 and specifically targets minorities, women, and low income city and county residents who are considering opening or expanding a business venture within the community. Fred Jones Business Development Center and Entrepot, Ok are both successful for-profit incubator models. Regardless of the business model, incubation programs are distinguished by management and boards of directors' commitment to ensuring application of best industry practices.

Action Plan

Month 1-2

- Designate point person to drive initiative (Daniel Robinson, Director of Community Development, City of Reading)

- Begin feasibility study (Point person to designate committee members to complete study)

- Further explore best practices with local, state, and national operating incubators; non- and for-profit models

- Reach out to National Business Incubator Association for other best practices

Month 3-5

- Create vision: capacity, industry focus, services to be offered

- Identify stakeholders, including the Latino Chamber of Commerce, Berks County Community Foundation, Hispanic

Leadership Institute (Centro Hispano), Berks Economic Partnership, etc.

- Meet with stakeholder public, private, non-profit entities at local, state, and federal level for buy-in and support (number of meetings and length of each meeting to be determined by point person and feasibility study committee members)

Month 6-9

- Complete feasibility study

- Design governance/corporate structure

- Identify supportive partnerships

- Identify potential funding sources, site location

- Develop critical success factors of incubator - e.g. clear metrics of success, leadership, service delivery system, selection/vetting process, sources of capital – micro lenders/angel investors/venture capitalists/local banks, etc.

- Design dashboard with indicators to measure outcomes

Month 10-12

- Develop business plan, including mission/vision, marketing plan, financials, staffing, site location

Month 12+

- Set up incubator

- Recruit businesses

- Monitor outcome measure against dashboard indicators

- Initiate process improvement strategies accordingly

Success Indicators

- Number of clients graduates/businesses created (overall)

- Number of graduates remaining in Reading

- Number of jobs created

- Number of jobs retained

- Increased sales revenue of clients in a physical year

- Amount of taxes paid

- Perception of community stakeholders

4. Expand industry partnerships for workforce development

We recommend the expansion and promotion of affordable workforce development programs that teach the skill sets required for family-sustaining jobs in Reading and Berks County to low-income unemployed and underemployed workers, and city youth who need preparation to enter the workforce. We agree wholeheartedly with the *Ride to Prosperity* recommendations for improved career and technical education, promotion of formal certifications, and increasing high school completion rates (see Education), and welcome the opportunity to work with the coalition to enhance workforce development.

The Berks County Workforce Investment Board (WIB), organized in 1999, has responsibility for identifying and advancing solutions to strategic workforce development in Berks County, including determining workforce development needs, coordinating employers, education, and workers, and overseeing Workforce Investment Act funds from the federal government. It is not the intention of the Rebuilding Reading Poverty Commission to reinvent the wheel, but rather to suggest that the wide array of workforce development efforts currently in place **include the tens of thousands of low-income Reading residents and focus on the creation and development of local jobs.**

Reading has another tremendous tremendous resource in the Schmidt Training and Technology Center at the Reading Area Community College (RACC), which provides customized training programs that adjust to the changing needs of employers. The WIB supports the Schmidt Center as one of its strategies for closing the gap between today's workforce and the skilled workers required by employers in Berks County for tomorrow's jobs. Training courses are offered in Manufacturing Technologies, Leadership and Workforce Development, Information Technology and Workplace Readiness, as well as custom programs based on employer needs.

More can be done to exploit this resource in assisting the poor and the working poor, including the involvement of additional employers, development of specific hiring commitments by local businesses, extending workforce development programs to other educational institutions, and the provision of reliable funding for a substantial number of student participants. Efforts also must include low-income residents lacking the resources to go back to school at this time--who may also have childcare needs, transportation issues or criminal records--who still need help finding and sustaining a job.

These efforts should be an integral part of the work by Berks County economic development organizations to attract firms to the area. The Mayor and City Council should also promote such programs to residents and employers, and recognize employers that hire trained local workers. Participating employers should commit to interviewing individuals who complete the program for appropriate positions within a

specified time period of graduation and incentivize their participation through tuition grants that will be repaid out of future earnings. Students will agree to remain with their original employer for a set period of time and with a Reading-based employer for subsequent set period of time.

Best Practices

United Community Services (UCS) serves the Building and Construction Industry Partnership by helping to develop a workforce pipeline into construction apprenticeships. The UCS Pre-Apprenticeship Program, in place since 2004 and duplicated throughout Pennsylvania, begins in 9th grade and includes YouthBuild (for out of school youth) to prepare them to enter apprenticeship programs. While there is no guarantee of employment, a youth who completes this program is ready to apply and be accepted into an apprenticeship. UCS collaborates with RACC as well as the Reading School District, all the Berks County Building Trades, and other community-based organizations.

Other best practices include the Career Transition Center for Dislocated Workers at the Community College of Allegheny County and "Kalamazoo (Michigan) Promise" program, which provides 100% tuition to qualifying public school high school students. Work-related training programs at Edmonds (California) Community College range from one-day training sessions to two-year professional-technical associate degrees, plus internship coordination, job search resources and job search coaching. For the business community, Edmonds Community College offers customized training, business advising, job postings, conference facilities, and the opportunity to support our training programs through our industry advisory committees. Based on strong partnerships between educational institutions and employers in the region, these programs identify workforce needs, develop appropriate training programs with deferred tuition, and assist graduates with job placement in public safety, health care and other sectors. We have found no programs that *guarantee* jobs to graduates, although data suggest a strong link between program completion and employment.

Action Plan

Month 1-4

- Coordination between WIB, WIB Industry Partnerships, Schmidt Training and Technology Center and City Hall to focus program goals on the needs of low-income residents

- Outreach to PA Careerlink etc. to gather program information and appropriate linkages

- Identify funding sources, including On the Job Training funds administered by the Berks County Careerlink, Pennsylvania Department of Labor, and local colleges and universities

- Business Survey to determine interest in this program, scope, requirements, etc.

- Development of career fair for participants in the non-credit programs

- Research NEHA (National Environmental Health Association) and others with workforce development programs focusing on particular industry areas and investigate possibility of partnering, even if it's just adding a space on the City website.

Month 4-6

- Expanded communication between WIB, RACC and area technical schools, Berks Economic Partnership, Reading Mayor and City Council, Economic Development Coordinator and area employers

- Career Fair planning and recruitment; website development

Month 6-12

- Match results of Business Survey to current programs and prioritize for launch

- Ongoing recruitment of new employers and recognition of participating employers

- Design Post-Employment Metrics

- Website linkage established and staff identified to maintain regular updates. Includes identification of individuals at other sites who will prepare and submit updated information such as calendar updates, grant availability etc.

- Career Fair plans finalized

- Develop advertising campaign workforce development that targets the unemployed and underemployed

Year 1+

- Expanded programs begin

- Graduation and employer satisfaction metrics in place

- Career Fair held and plans for 2nd Career Fair underway

- Website linkage updated regularly

Success Indicators

- Graduation rates from programs

- Hiring rates by employers; initial hires and individuals still at company 12 months later

- Employer satisfaction surveys

- Employee satisfaction

- Career Fair participation

5. Develop an authentic marketing plan for Reading

Reading is home to people from more than 30 nations, each with their own unique and rich cultural heritage. Yet this diversity has often been ignored or disparaged. Cultural diversity and sensitivity to difference is critical to all economic development projects in Reading. We cannot emphasize this enough. Handled creatively, the celebration and promotion of our extraordinary diversity would attract businesses, residents and visitors, improve the perception of the city in neighboring communities, and enhance the city's own self-esteem.

We recommend the development of a **comprehensive, multi-faceted marketing plan** for Reading that brands the city as a multicultural destination, highlights cultural diversity as beneficial to business, allocates resources for permanent multicultural projects, and promotes thinking/buying locally. The marketing program must also include the participation of culturally diverse groups in the decision-making process of initiatives such as the Penn Street Corridor and River Front projects so multicultural enterprises such as fairs, festivals, parades and El Mercado occur frequently throughout the year (as in Baltimore, MD) and are shaped by the people whose cultures they reflect.

An authentic, homegrown El Mercado, for example--whether on the riverfront or elsewhere--can integrate and unify Reading's Hispanic and other ethnic groups, serving as a community center and a source of fresh food and original crafts to residents who are not well served by supermarkets. Downtown workers and inner city residents, including many elderly people, would rely on the market to give them an alternative to fast-food meals. It will have a powerful catalytic effect on adjacent neighborhoods by attracting marketing customers and businesses that share those customers. And it will provide local farmers with new opportunities to sell their produce. Market vendors must be offered technical assistance and consulting on business plan development, marketing and financial analysis.

Best Practices

In 2003, Philadelphia launched a highly successful $300,000 campaign branding the city as a gay-friendly destination. The campaign reached out to gays, lesbians and transgendered individuals throughout the nation, offering gay travelers a vibrant cultural scene, fine dining, outstanding accommodations and a year-round calendar of events of interest to gay travelers. Within 18 months of launch, research indicated that for every dollar spent on marketing, gay tourism returned $153 to the city in direct spending. The

campaign, which is still going strong, currently features the tagline "Get your history straight and your nightlife gay."

Once a thriving steel town of 20,000, Braddock, Pennsylvania, is a shell of its former self, struggling to stay alive despite the loss of 90% of its population. Braddock is in the process of turning despair into opportunity, leveraging its remaining assets with new ideas and attempting to spark a cultural and economic revitalization.

"Reinvention is the Only Option" is Braddock's slogan, because under the leadership of its iconoclastic mayor John Fetterman, the town has the wisdom to concede that since it will never again be what it was, a new future must be imagined and created. Braddock and Fetterman have plenty of detractors, but its story is undeniably bold and invigorating. "Richly historic, large enough to matter, small enough to impact, Braddock presents an unparalleled opportunity for the urban pioneer, artist, or misfit to join in building a new kind of community. For those who seek it, this is the frontier."

Plans for such projects as El Mercado, a Farmers' Market at 8th and Penn, and the Penn Street Corridor must take into account the needs and desires of all city residents.

Action Plan

Month 1-3

- Economic Development Coordinator, working with a coalition of community partners, develops a request for proposals. Guildelines include

- Celebration of cultural diversity

- Creative

- Utilization of all media opportunities, including low-tech methods accessible to the poor

- Solicitation of proposals from qualified marketing/ branding firms

Month 4-6

- Review of proposals

Month 7+

- Implementation

Success Indicators

- Increased tourism

- Increased growth in existing and new business

- Increased pride within the city

- Increased respect from surrounding communities

Housing

The following recommendations are designed to increase the safety and value of the city's housing stock, foster home-ownership and community connectedness, and breakdown prejudices against the poor that have undermined previous efforts to improve housing conditions.

1. Focus on neighborhoods with maximum potential for success

To achieve tangible and sustainable impact, housing revitalization efforts must be focused on a target neighborhood or neighborhoods--not, as is the current practice, on individual houses. The recommended target areas are not the most stable neighborhoods, nor the most deteriorated, but rather those in the middle, adjacent to stable, well maintained housing, where the cycle of disinvestment is not yet entrenched and where targeted efforts can have a visible impact on improving the quality of the housing, making the neighborhood a more attractive place to live and invest. Targets:

1. Ricktown Arts District, North of Penn, bounded by Front Street to the west, Fourth Street to the East, Washington Street to the South and Buttonwood Street to the North. Work is already underway in the new Ricktown Arts District, named for the four Rick brothers who owned much of the land there in the late 1800s. Ambitious plans seek to transform the nine-square-block area north of the GoggleWorks into a viable and sustainable mixed-income, mixed-use neighborhood.

2. South of Penn: area generally bounded by 3rd St. to the west, 5th St. to the east, Cherry St. to the north and Bingaman St. to the south.

3. North of Penn: area generally bounded by Buttonwood to the north, Washington to the south, 3rd St. to the west and 6th St. to the east.

4. West of Centre Park: area generally bounded by Windsor St. to the north, Greenwich St. to the south, Weiser St. to the west and Thorn St. to the east.

The Housing Committee determined appropriate targets areas based on the potential of the neighborhood to become a place where residents and potential residents are motivated to invest their time, energy, and money in the future of the neighborhood. Evaluation factors included the type and condition of housing stock, number and extent of vacant properties, ownership characteristics of the neighborhood,

and opportunities to create synergies between housing reinvestment and other revitalization strategies such as economic development.

This recommendation and the one following (*Engage city residents)* add up to a strategic approach capable of transforming and revitalizing the physical, economic and social landscape of selected Reading neighborhoods over the next ten years. City-funded and non-profit housing initiatives should be coordinated on a regular and consistent basis to focus on these target areas. Target areas should serve for at least five years, and then be re-evaluated to determine if housing efforts should continue to focus there or if new target areas should be identified.

Best Practices

Richmond, Virginia, followed the conventional practice of distributing federal housing dollars across its distressed neighborhoods for many years, finding little success in achieving lasting impact. In the early 1990s, Richmond began concentrating its resources on specific neighborhoods, focusing eighty percent of its HOME Investment Partnership Program funds and Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) grants on 6- to 12-block areas. Local Initiative Support Corporation (LISC) aligned its grants and loans with these public dollars. The program, called "Neighborhoods in Bloom" promoted home ownership as well as improved rental housing opportunities. It resulted in property values in the target neighborhoods increasing relatively faster than the city as a whole, and provided documented spillover effects to other neighborhoods.

The Healthy Neighborhoods Initiative in Baltimore, Maryland, seeks to revitalize Baltimore communities by reinvigorating stagnant real-estate markets and building stronger connections among residents. It focuses on ten neighborhoods that are stable but at risk for disinvestment. It brings a market-based approach to re-energizing neighborhood real estate markets and uses a range of programs including low-cost, forgivable loans and matching grants for property owners to repair and rehabilitate their buildings, outreach and education to real-estate agents to ensure that prospective residents are exposed to the neighborhood, and engaging current and prospective residents to become directly involved in strengthening and promoting the positive aspects—the assets—of their communities. The Healthy Neighborhoods approach to building home equity and strengthening the social fabric in target neighborhoods has been a successful and nationally replicated strategy for reversing the cycle of decline in urban neighborhoods and ensuring a sustainable future.

Action Plan

Month 1-2

- Housing Coordinator John Kromer assembles Steering Committee of city, county and non-profit agencies engaged in housing revitalization in Reading

Months 3-5

- Explore best practices for housing improvement target areas implemented in other communities nationwide

- Develop critical success factors (Housing Coordinator in collaboration with Steering Committee)

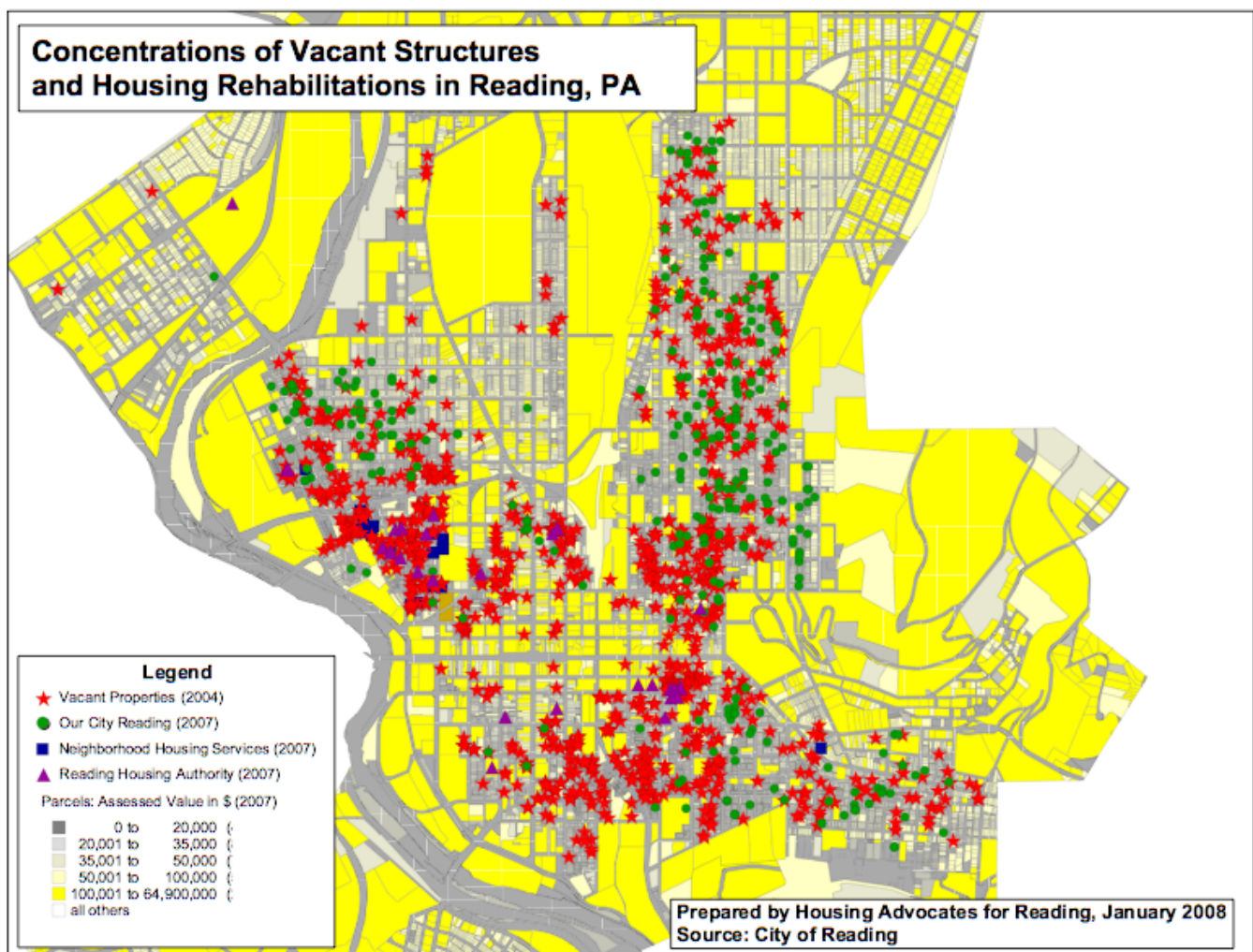- Design dashboard with indicators to measure outcomes

Months 6-9

- Identify additional stakeholders, including funders

- Meet with stakeholder public, private, non-profit entities at local, state, and federal level for buy-in and support (number of meetings and length of each meeting to be determined by point person and Steering Committee)

Months 10+

- Align stakeholders activities to focus on target areas

- Rework city funding allocations to focus activities in target areas

- Develop partnerships to grow income stream to support revitalization activities, including outreach to local and national foundations, housing development intermediaries, banks and other resources.

Success Indicators

- Percentage of homes rehabilitated in target neighborhoods

- Median sale price of residential properties

- Municipal taxes paid

Concentrations of Vacant Structures and Housing Rehabilitations in Reading, PA

Legend
- Vacant Properties (2004)
- Our City Reading (2007)
- Neighborhood Housing Services (2007)
- Reading Housing Authority (2007)

Parcels: Assessed Value in $ (2007)
- 0 to 20,000
- 20,001 to 35,000
- 35,001 to 50,000
- 50,001 to 100,000
- 100,001 to 64,900,000
- all others

Prepared by Housing Advocates for Reading, January 2008
Source: City of Reading

2. Engage city residents as partners in neighborhood-driven revitalization

A crucial step in developing a sustainable housing revitalization strategy is a planning process in which residents of each target neighborhood develop a shared, creative vision for their neighborhood's future as a vibrant, productive and healthy community. The process should involve--as community partners--the institutions, businesses and government agencies whose work has an impact on the neighborhood. The goal of the neighborhood planning process is the development of a single comprehensive neighborhood development strategy that addresses housing, commercial district revitalization, economic development and transportation. Since neighborhood planning is an intensive process demanding significant resources in terms of time, energy and funding, we recommend that planning efforts be undertaken sequentially, according to the target priorities outlined in Recommendation 1: South of Penn; North of Penn; West of Centre Park.

The neighborhood-based planning effort requires a coordinating entity with leadership drawn from the neighborhood, such as a community development corporation like Neighborhood Housing Services (NHS) or New Creation CDC. Other organizations engaged in revitalization efforts, such as a well-organized community group or a faith-based organization focused on neighborhood improvements, would also be good candidates to lead a neighborhood planning effort, provided that they have or develop the capacity to manage a complex outreach and engagement process and, most importantly, lead implementation efforts to realize the vision and goals of the plan. Partnerships with colleges and universities with capacity in community planning may be an effective way to leverage additional support and expertise.

Best Practices

Lawrence CommunityWorks (LCW) is a nonprofit community development corporation in Lawrence, Massachusetts, a small city about 35 miles northwest of Boston with a population of about 72,000 that in 2000 was 60% Hispanic. LCW has engaged hundreds of residents in developing and implementing "Reviviendo," a resident-driven revitalization plan for the North Common District of Lawrence that has resulted in the development of new affordable housing on formerly vacant lots, the rehabilitation of deteriorated properties for affordable rental and home ownership, the creation of new parks, playgrounds and community gardens, and a zoning overlay district to promote development that conforms to principles of "smart growth."

Our older cities, our struggling neighborhoods, our isolated poor rural communities, are filled with people who have ambition for themselves and their children and who, with a little support, have the resourcefulness and the spirit to persevere through hard times and succeed. These are the communities where America reinvents itself generation after generation, these are the places that shape the lives of our children and these are the neighborhoods that hold the rich history of our struggles and triumphs.
--Lawrence Community Works

Action Plan

Month 1

- Identify lead organization or organizations in the first target neighborhood

Months 2 -4

- Assemble Steering Committee of resident leaders, businesses and institutions in the target neighborhood

- Prepare proposal to fund neighborhood planning initiative. Sources of funding include Wachovia Regional Foundation, which provides grants of up to $100,000 for the development of comprehensive neighborhood plans.

Once funded:

Months 1-6: Research and documentation

- Overseen by the Housing Coordinator, collect and analyze information on housing, commercial activity, public safety, street trees, parks, faith communities, human service organizations, neighborhood groups and other neighborhood assets

- Compile, distribute and code a resident survey

- Finalize report on existing conditions

Months 7-12: Planning

- Interview stakeholders

- Conduct focus groups

- Prepare preliminary recommendations

- Hold public meetings to review

- Complete final recommendations, including implementation and financing plans

Months 13+: Implementation

- Lead organization and Steering Committee will coordinate implementation efforts

- Possible sources of funding include a grant of up to $750,000 from the Wachovia Regional Foundation to support implementation

3. Transform vacant properties with a Community Land Trust

Vacant and deteriorated houses have a significant negative impact on the quality of life and value of real estate in Reading neighborhoods, where many of the residents living in low-quality housing are also severely cost-burdened, paying more than thirty percent of their incomes for housing. According to a study by Great Valley Consultants in 2007, almost 1,500 of Reading's approximately 27,000 properties were vacant.

We recommend the establishment of a Community Land Trust that can serve as an institutional mechanism to meet the twin needs in the community for 1) reclaiming and restoring vacant housing, and 2) connecting quality affordable housing demand to available rehabilitated homes. As a single, independent, nonprofit entity with expertise in acquiring and developing these substandard properties, the Community Land Trust will utilize a consistent and transparent process--including clear criteria and well-advertised timelines for demolition--to manage vacant properties as a community asset, reclaiming, restoring and actively promoting their permanent strategic re-use. Demolition will be considered where there is a clear plan for intentional use. The Land Trust will:

- Acquire vacant and abandoned property through purchase, donation, or foreclosure

- Market property to individuals and nonprofit entities that will rehabilitate or redevelop it consistent with community-driven neighborhood plans

- Hold and maintain property over time to position the community to take advantage of future opportunities and

changes in the city planning process

- Assemble obsolete and deteriorated property and vacant land into larger parcels suitable for redevelopment

The Community Land Trust can be implemented within one year, and will require funding from Community Development Block Grants, private grants, and revenues from the sale and/or long-term leasing of properties and land. Outcomes include a streamlined process for transforming vacant properties into viable homes and businesses--including the combination of adjacent undersized residential structures into larger single or multi-family residential dwelling units or business entities--and a significant reduction in the number of vacant properties.

Best Practices

The Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI) is a resident-led community-based planning and organizing nonprofit organization based in the Dudley Street section of the Roxbury neighborhood in Boston, Massachusetts. In 1984, about one-third of the land in the Dudley area was vacant as a result of disinvestment, abandonment, and arson. DSNI established a community land trust in 1988 to secure and manage vacant property in their community. Through the land trust, they have implemented a resident-driven neighborhood revitalization plan that includes affordable housing, greenspace development, and commercial district revitalization.

Action Plan

Month 1-2

- Designate point person to drive initiative (John Kromer, Housing Coordinator, City of Reading)

- Assemble Steering Committee of city, county and non-profit agencies engaged in housing revitalization in Reading

Months 3-5

- Explore best practices for land trusts implemented in other communities nation-wide

- Develop critical success factors (Housing Coordinator in collaboration with Steering Committee)

- Design dashboard with indicators to measure outcomes

Months 6-9

- Identify additional stakeholders, including funders

- Meet with stakeholder public, private, non-profit entities at local, state, and federal level for buy-in and support (number of meetings and length of each meeting to be determined by point person and Steering Committee)

- Design Land Trust structure

- Establish transparent process for acquisition and disposition of property

- Design strategy for property maintenance

Months 10-12

- Develop partnerships to grow income stream to support land trust activities, including outreach to local and national foundations, housing development intermediaries, banks and other resources.

Months 13+

- Begin acquiring properties for the land trust

- Maintain properties to prevent property deterioration and promote neighborhood stability

- Implement disposition strategy consistent with community plans

Success Indicators

- Number/percentage of vacant properties acquire

- Number/percentage of properties rehabilitated or redeveloped

- Code violation

- Total public and private investment

4. Incentivize home ownership and rehabilitation

There are a number of simple ways to incentivize and support Reading residents in moving towards home ownership and home rehabilitation.

• **Family Savings Accounts**. The Reading Housing Authority should work with the Berks Community Action Program, Inc. (BCAP) to facilitate the use of Family Savings Accounts for tenants. In additional to their rent payment, tenants would choose to have a specific amount of money diverted into a Family Savings Account for a down payment and closing costs to apply towards the purchase of their future home in Reading. For example, if a tenant's rent obligation is $150.00 per month, she could pay $206 to the Reading Housing Authority, with $56.00 automatically transferred into a Family Savings Account ($56.00 is currently the minimum monthly contribution). Administered by BCAP, the program would match dollar for dollar any contribution made by a participant (i.e. tenant) up to a total of $2,000.00. Home ownership and

home maintenance training should also be offered to all new homeowners by Neighborhood Housing Services.

• **Stakeholder projects**. Neighborhood rehabilitation projects offer excellent opportunities to engage and involve local residents in skill building and stake-holding efforts. Both the land trust and community revitalization can be conducted in large part using local labor in partnership with local businesses and community organizations. This would enable the development of valuable job skill training in land management, construction, beautification and other important areas. Existing models include YouthBuild and AmeriCorps.

• **Sweat equity.** The use of local labor could offer "sweat equity" investments in neighborhood projects. For example, a group of residents that clear off a vacant lot that is no longer privately owned could be issued a conditional title to the property. A person who contributes their labor to the construction or rehabilitation of vacant homes could be issued credit towards the acquisition of their own home through the land trust. This could open the potential of home ownership to people unable to afford the upfront costs while fostering them as invested instead of transient residents. Other incentive programs such as $1 Homestead Programs accompanied by low interest loans and tax credits, or the Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Good Neighbor Next Door program encourage people to move to the city and to improve the housing stock in targeted neighborhoods.

Best Practices

In Allentown, the Housing Association and Development Corporation (HADC) has rehabbed 250 properties since it was formed in 1978 to preserve and revitalize Allentown's older residential neighborhoods. Since 2008, with support from local corporations and the State of Pennsylvania through the Neighborhood Partnership Program, HADC has worked on comprehensive neighborhood revitalization inside a 24-square block target area in central Allentown. In 2002, HADC created an in-house construction crew that is currently responsible for the majority of its rehabilitation work. Today the crew numbers 18, almost all of them neighborhood residents. Most joined HADC with few job skills and poor work histories. They work for HADC as apprentices, earning full-time wages and benefits while receiving on-the-job training in the building trades.

Action Plan

Month 1-3

- Housing Coordinator John Kromer and Reading Housing Authority Executive Director Daniel F. Luckey meet with Jasmine Pelaez, who administers the Family Saving Account Program within the Berks Community Action Program (BCAP)

- Non-profit developers, YouthBuild administrator Ruth Matthews, Director of Community Development Dan

Robinson, the Executive Director of the Redevelopment Authority, and the Housing Coordinator plan construction projects.

- The Reading Housing Authority and the Berks Community Action Program Iimplement a process in which excess rent payments beyond $56 are diverted to existing Family Saving Accounts.

Month 4-6

- Case managers with the Reading Housing Authority are trained to educate tenants who are either living in public housing or receiving section 8 assistance, during the tenants' annual evaluation, about the Family Saving Accounts Program to purchase homes.

- Non-profit developers,YouthBuild, Director of Community Development, the Executive Director of the Redevelopment Authority, and the Housing Coordinator must identify specific projects for YouthBuild participation.

Success Indicators

- Number of Family Saving Accounts created by persons receiving assistance from the Reading Housing Authority

- Number of projects using "sweat equity" and local labor

5. Create a Housing Panel to streamline and coordinate revitalization

A **Housing Panel with advisory as well as coordinating functions** is necessary to ensure that housing recommendations are implemented and that new ideas continue to be generated. This panel could work as an advisory body to Housing Coordinator. The panel will make recommendations to streamline procedures, provide homeowners with information on how to obtain grants or low-interest loans to repair and renovate their properties, partner as one-to-one mentors with new homeowners, and identify impediments to private investment. The Housing Panel, which may include representatives from government and local housing agencies, as well as real estate investors, non profit organizational leaders, faith leaders, attorneys, educators, social justice advocates, renters and home owners, will serve as an advisory body to the Mayor's office and City Council.

An Internet-accessible, **GIS-linked property information system** must also be implemented to attract developers, successfully monitor all real estate transactions, and facilitate code enforcement.

Recommendations will be based on information provided by

the Property Maintenance Division of the Police Department, the Building/Trades Division of the Community Development Office, the Planning Commission, the Zoning Hearing Board, Blighted Property Review Committee, the Redevelopment Authority and organizations that receive federal and state funding through the Community Development Office and other city agencies. Information will be gathered on foreclosures, "Section 8" housing, rental units, owner-occupied housing, "Homesteading," "Artists and Musicians Colonies," (similar to Habitat for Humanity's post Katrina project in New Orleans) and other affordable housing initiatives. The establishment of a coordinating function can be implemented within one year. Outcomes will include a housing data warehouse available on the city's website, and published guidelines for homeowners on how to obtain grants and low-interest loans as well as advice designed to navigate through the various state and federal government programs for home repairs and renovations.

Action Plan

Month 1-3

- Housing Coordinator John Kromer works with Eric Weiss, the Property Maintenance Division of the Police Department, the Building/Trades Division of the Community Development Office, the Planning Commission, the Zoning Hearing Board, Blighted Property Review Committee, the Redevelopment Authority, the Housing Coordinator, and organizations that receive federal and state funding through the Community Development Office and other city agencies to create a Housing Panel within the Community Development office.

- The Information Technology department for the City of Reading meets with relevant city department heads and county agencies, such as the Recorder of Deeds, to create an information system that makes real estate records Internet-accessible and GIS-linked to attract developers, successfully monitor all real estate transactions, and facilitate code enforcement.

Month 4-12

- Housing Panel begins making recommendations on housing initiatives, target areas, housing development, etc.

- Property information system implemented, making real estate records Internet-accessible and GIS-linked

Months 13+

- The establishment of a coordinating function. A housing data warehouse, updated monthly, will be available on the city's website, with guidelines for homeowners on obtaining grants and low-interest loans as well as advice designed to navigate through the various state

and federal government programs for home repairs and renovations.

Success Indicators

- Housing data warehouse available on the city's website, and updated monthly

- Streamlined procedures

- Published guidelines for homeowners on how to obtain grants and low-interest loans as well as advice designed to navigate through the various state and federal government programs for home repairs and renovations

6. Conduct systematic, professional, proactive inspection of all rental properties

In order to insure consistent and fair inspections of all properties inspected by the Property Maintenance Division of the Reading Police Department, all Property Maintenance Inspectors must receive formalized training in code enforcement standards and techniques based on the International Code Council (ICC) standards. Currently, inspectors for Building/Trades Division of Code Enforcement do receive ICC training while Property Maintenance Inspectors do not, and it would be more efficient to train all Property Maintenance Inspectors in the Reading area at the same time. However, if this is deemed impractical, the Property Maintenance Division should prioritize training in reverse seniority (i.e. the inspectors with the least experience would receive ICC training before the more experienced inspectors). Magisterial District Justices should also receive instruction on ICC standards.

The Property Maintenance Division of Codes Enforcement, in cooperation with the Building/Trades Division of Code Enforcement and the Blighted Property Review Committee, should develop a systematic inspection schedule in which all residential properties within a subsection of the city will be the focus of a coordinated and timely inspection effort by these departments. Such a process will ensure that all the housing for an entire section of the city will be adequately and thoroughly inspected, and the process will be perceived as fair and consistent. The Housing Committee recommends that each year, properties in one of five sections of the city will be systematically inspected, with the result that every property in the city will be inspected once within five years for the first inspection cycle.

Quarterly reports of property inspections should be compiled by the Property Maintenance Division and the Building/Trades Division and published on the City of Reading official website. These reports should include data on the number of properties inspected, the number of code violations categorized by severity, the number of code violations corrected; the number of properties demolished, and, any

other pertinent information. The individual nature of all existing code violations will be re-evaluated to insure that they are not burdensome to homeowners, legitimate property investors, and small landlords, and that they reflect a primary focus on health and safety issues. This program should coincide with the creation of the Housing Panel, be linked to the online property information system and implemented within one year, with one complete cycle executed within five years. In addition, the city should list all rental properties on the city's official website that are non-compliant with city regulations to ensure that tenants do not move into properties that are subject condemnation by the city.

Best Practices

Allentown conducted a five-year inspection cycle in the 1990s covering all rental properties in the city. The first cycle actually took seven years, but subsequent inspection cycles took significantly less time. The program in Reading will result in increased efficiency since the property inspectors will not have to travel throughout the city to inspect various properties on their inspection list for a particular day. Property inspectors will be able to conduct six or more targeted inspections of rental properties a day instead of the current five.

Action Plan

Month 1-2

- Housing Coordinator John Kromer, Director of the Property Maintenance Division and the Director of Community Development arrange for training with the Director of Corporate and Public Safety Education at Northampton Community College Tom Barnowski, who administers the only program in Pennsylvania offering ICC training to code enforcement inspectors both in the classroom and "on the field."

- All Property Maintenance Inspectors trained

- Following the ICC training, all Property Maintenance Inspectors should become members of the Pennsylvania Building Officials Conference, with membership fees paid by the City of Reading

- The Director of Property Maintenance Division of Codes Enforcement, the Director of Building/Trades Division of Code Enforcement, the chair of the Blighted Property Review Committee, and Housing Coordinator should agree on the boundaries for the five inspection districts that will serve as the focus for the inspection cycle

Month 3-6

- Working with the Director of Property Maintenance Division of Codes Enforcement, the Director of Building/Trades Division of Code Enforcement, the chair of the Blighted Property Review Committee, and the Housing Coordinator, the Information Technology Department for the City of Reading creates a section within the city's website posting inspection schedules, criteria and results.

- Focused inspection plan launched

Success Indicators

- All Property Maintenance Inspectors trained and enrolled in PENNBOC

- Five inspection sectors identified and publicized, and five-year cycle functioning effectively

Education

Improving education may not immediately reduce poverty, but it is indisputably one of the most important strategies for decreasing community risks factors and increasing resilience and economic well being in the long term. Education is a long-term investment, in other words--an investment with the least immediate payoff and yet the greatest potential for positive impact in the long term.

Moreover, the effects of individual poverty are compounded by the concentration of poverty in certain neighborhoods. Children from low-income families who grow up in high-poverty neighborhoods face academic and life challenges above and beyond the challenges faced by children from low-income families who grow up in neighborhoods without a high concentration of poverty. Conversely, economic research consistently finds that education correlates directly and positively to earnings. Educated people are more likely to get jobs and receive better pay; this holds true for all racial and economic groups, and for both girls and boys. Education generates economic growth and thus generates tax revenue and incomes. And education produces social benefits including better nutrition, health care and civic participation.

The following recommendations strive to reach highly ambitious goals at every level of the educational process from Head Start and nursery school programs through post secondary degree programs that are both academic and technical/vocational in nature. Some address immediate crises such as truancy, violence, and illiteracy in Reading, while others focus on longer-term investments such as early childhood development. But all share the perspective that education is critical--from cradle to college or vocational school to career--and the conviction that there must be widely shared responsibility for both problems and solutions.

In 2006, in the City of Reading,

- *46.9% of births were to mothers who had less than a high school degree.*

- *An estimated 39.8% of children under age 5 were under 100% of the poverty level ($20,000 for a family of 4).*

- *22% of births were to mothers under the age of 20. When compared to other municipalities in Pennsylvania, Reading ties for first with the city of York in this area.*

- *73% of births were to unmarried mothers.*

- *The Reading School District estimated that 70% of children entering kindergarten lacked one or more of the basic life skills needed to be successful in school.*

--United Way of Berks County

1. Ensure accountability and efficiency through cooperation, collaboration and financial transparency

Despite the best efforts of hundreds of hardworking and well-meaning educators, the educational landscape of Reading is fraught with inefficiency, waste and a profound lack of accountability. As a first step, we recommend a community-wide **Education Summit be convened no later than early March 2011**, hosted by a diverse steering committee, at Alvernia University's Holleran Center for Community Engagement, and including all stakeholders in the education process in Reading. The Summit will provide an opportunity for all stakeholders to communicate and collaborate as equal partners in an atmosphere of openness and respect. The goals of the Summit should include

1. identification of shared objectives and opportunities for collaboration

2. a comprehensive mapping of programs and services provided by all community education partners that reveals redundancies, inefficiencies and waste

3. a transparent and very specific line item accounting of all public funding related to education, and the establishment of an ongoing system for financial transparency, including expert review of the chart of accounts

4. development of a "dashboard"--a shared management tool that enables all education partners to monitor funding, expenditures and investments, as well as evidence-based indicators of graduation, truancy and dropout rates; teacher turnover and other important factors

A **comprehensive and transparent review of the use of public funds**—consistent with that described under Policy and Governance--will ensure effectiveness, fairness and relevance to current and emerging educational needs. This must be done immediately and with full transparency to break down "silos" between systems, neutralize widespread mistrust, ensure accountability, eliminate redundancy and answer the fundamental question, *Are existing programs and providers adequately reaching and teaching city residents?*

The statewide Costing-Out Study in 2007 revealed profound systemic discrepancies in how education is funded. Poorer districts like Reading, which require more resources to ensure that each student can achieve Adequate Yearly Progress, have fewer resources per pupil than their suburban counterparts. With an enrollment in 2005-06 of 17,841, The Reading School District spent $7,458 per pupil, compared to the costing out estimate of *what should be spent to achieve adequate and equitable education* of $13,869 per pupil. In other words, R*eading spent, on average, $6,437 per pupil less that what was necessary*. We must have transparency to know whether and to what extent the costing-out study is being funded--and where to go from here.

Participants in the Summit--and the financial review-- must include not only the Reading School District, but also the administrations of the city, county, and other traditional agencies now receiving the bulk of government monies designated for education, recreation, child care, transportation, youth and families, job training, etc. This is a tall order, and there are no quick fixes, but change is now mandatory; we simply cannot afford to continue with business as usual.

Action Plan

Month 1-3

The Steering Committee, in collaboration with key stakeholders, will establish goals and agenda for Education Summit; identify and invite Summit partners; clarify parameters and systems for achieving financial transparency; and plan for the event. Participants include but not limited to:

- Reading School District
- Reading School Board
- Reading Education Association Community Committee
- Berks County Intermediate Unit
- Area colleges and universities (RACC, Albright, Alvernia, Penn State, Kutztown)
- Workforce Investment Board/Career Link
- Department of Public Welfare
- Libraries
- United Way

- Berks County Community Foundation
- Neighborhood Housing Services
- United Labor Council
- United Community Services
- Community Prevention Program
- Union Dominico-Americana
- Greater Berks Food Bank
- Olivet Girls and Boys Club
- Goggleworks
- Yocum Institute
- Berks Technical Institute
- Migrant Head Start
- EHS Pathstone
- Faith-based groups

Month 4

- Education Summit in early March 2011

Month 5-7

- Mapping of programs and services provided by all community education partners that reveals redundancies, inefficiencies and waste
- Financial accounting system in place, with an easily accessible link on the Reading School District website. Data to include, with line item specificity:
- all federal, state, local and non-governmental income, including EITC funding (Education Improvement Tax Credit)
- all expenditures by the Reading School District and Reading School Board
- results of formal internal and external audits

Month 8 + ongoing

- Dashboard designed, implemented and shared with all education partners
- Annual meeting of all partners to review objectives, results and goals

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Success Indicators

- Increased trust and cooperation among education partners

- Reduction of waste and inefficiency

- Ongoing financial transparency

- Shared dashboard

2. Reduce extreme truancy and dropout rates

The Reading School District (RSD) is deeply affected by widespread poverty, extreme high school dropout rates, low academic achievement (PA District Report Card 2007-2008), and hostile hallways and school grounds. While the overall dropout rate for RSD has been over 10 percent for many years (compared to an average PA rate of 2.5 percent and Berks County rate of 3 percent), the cohort attrition rate has grown to 50 percent (as measured by comparing the numbers of ninth graders in their freshman year with the corresponding numbers of graduates in their senior year). The reasons for this may be varied, but it is clearly not reflected in the latest reported school dropout rate of 13 percent due to many students just disappearing from the radar screens of school administrators with little follow-up deemed possible. The graduation rate of 65 percent is far below the state target of 80 percent; the rate of those with an individualized education plan (IEP) is 49 percent versus the state rate of 83 percent.

Decades of research has made it clear that dropping out of high school is a very serious issue for students, for the community, for our state, and for the nation. School dropouts earn only one-half as much annual income as high school graduates, one-half of our prison population are dropouts, and one-half of heads of households on welfare are high school dropouts. High school dropouts are three times more likely than high school graduates who do not attend college to be welfare recipients. While this does not mean that dropping out of school *causes* these negative outcomes, nor that a high school diploma is a complete solution, the data imply that high school dropouts are a high-risk student population that warrants specific programmatic interventions aimed at increasing the likelihood of success in school.
Truancy is also a huge problem in Reading as evidenced by the more than 7,000 truancy fines issued to parents so far this school year. The addition a few years ago of staff positions for Home-School Liaison and Intervention Specialist may have helped, but the return on this investment is unclear and much more needs to be done to determine what is needed to address this problem effectively.

To address truancy and dropout, we recommend the funding, development and implementation of:

- Evidence-based **programs to identify and intervene with students at risk of dropping out.** Intervention programs should be designed to meet the curricular, logistic, and interpersonal needs of students at risk of dropping out, and include flexible scheduling to accommodate relevant work. It may be appropriate to revive the "Stay in School Committee," which once functioned well as a district-community partnership with a diverse membership, as well as the implementation of peer mentoring programs that are both culturally sensitive and based upon accepted educational models.

- Meaningful alternatives to adjudication and truancy fines

- Data systems to track dropout prevention program implementation and outcomes

- Program models that preserve students' legal rights, particularly those with disabilities, by serving them within the K-12 public system

- Reduced class size and student:counselor ratios to develop meaningful student relationships with adults in the school

Best Practices

Decades of research shows us that dropout is the result of student, family, and school factors that collectively disengage students from formal education. The most effective prevention programs address all three areas to re-engage students in learning. The following approaches have been demonstrated to significantly reduce dropout. Since many address additional problems as well, they are repeated and expanded elsewhere in this report.

- Invest in early childhood education

- Build information systems that can pinpoint at-risk students

- Build and support student transition programs for the middle years

- Support a challenging, individualized curriculum with a career-learning component

- Ensure that all students have meaningful relationships with adults at school

- Develop and advertise individualized, non-traditioal High school options

Action Plan

Month 1-3

- In collaboration with community partners, the Reading Education Association and PSEA will research and design evidence-based programs to identify students at risk of dropping out and intervene to reduce the likelihood of dropout

- Community education partners, with legal counsel, will identify meaningful alternatives to adjudication and truancy fines

Month 4-6

- Development of data systems to track dropout prevention program implementation and program outcomes

- Working with community partners and the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission, REA and the RSD will develop program models that preserve comprehensive student legal rights, particularly for students with disabilities, by serving them within the K-12 public system

Month 6+

- Efforts to reduce class size and student:counselor ratios to develop meaningful student relationships with adults in the school

Success Indicators

- Reduced truancy and dropout rates

- Evidence-based and legally compliant programs in place to identify and intervene with at-risk students, with data tracking

- Reduced class size and student:counselor ratios

3. Reduce and prevent violence in school and community

High poverty and low education rates, along with family and community deterioration, top the list of risk factors for violence in Reading. Students and parents report that, beyond bullying and verbal/physical harassment, fear of violence is one of the most important factors in truancy--students quite literally fear for their lives in a building rife with guns and knives--and many continue to demand the installation of metal detectors.

Corresponding resilience factors to be strengthened include meaningful opportunities for participation, positive attachments and relationships, and consistent, ongoing training for students, faculty, guidance counselors, athletic coaches, volunteers, and administrative staff related to ethnic, racial, LGBT (sexual orientation and gender identity or expression), and inter-group relations.

The long awaited opening of the new "Citadel" (Reading Intermediate High School for the 9th and 10th grades), while welcome as relief from overcrowding, is not an adequate solution to serious safety and security problems. Certainly, the Citadel offers an immediate and dramatic reduction in overcrowding and a beautiful state of the art facility. However, it must also be part of a coherent district-wide improvement

plan that is widely understood to address these problems head on and restores public confidence.

To address risk factors and build resilience, the Reading School District and the City of Reading must work much more actively and collaboratively with the community, including the Mayor's Youth Violence Coalition (formerly the 222 Corridor Anti-Gang Initiative), the Reading Youth Violence Prevention (RVYP) Planning Project, and the Reading Communities that Care (CTC). These coalitions have engaged hundreds of local stakeholders and are bringing significant new resources and expertise into the community. Through these avenues, a comprehensive youth development and violence prevention framework and draft action plan were crafted in early 2010 and currently await greater buy-in from both the school district and city administrations. In addition, we recommend a set of comprehensive, evidence-based efforts to increase student achievement by improving school climate, including:

- Build accountability systems that take account of more than reading, math, physical violence, and science scores. Narrowly focused measures of accountability fail to account for the complex needs of children

- Develop evidence-based statewide standards for school climate, tools to measure school climate, and resources and technical assistance to help all schools meet school climate standards

- Implement research-based anti-bullying and resiliency-building programs

- Help educators implement school-wide positive behavior support programs to encourage appropriate behavior among students

- Support community schools models that bring health, social, and other services into the school to meet the multiple and complex needs of students related to health and well-being

- Develop successful models and professional development to help educators build systems to ensure every student will have a supportive relationship with at least one adult in school

Best Practices

The term "school climate" refers to the character and quality of school life. It reflects multiple aspects of people's experience of school life, including: norms, goals, values; interpersonal relationships; teaching, learning; leadership practices; and organizational structures. Safe school climate indicators are directly linked to student academic performance, and a positive school climate is key to fostering healthy child development and high-level learning. Positive school climate is also associated with fewer behavioral and emotional problems for students. Research examining the impact of school climate in high-risk urban environments finds that that a supportive school climate can have a particularly

strong impact on the academic success experienced by urban students, as well as greater job satisfaction among school staff and higher rates of staff retention.

To support safe and productive learning environments, schools can engage in several evidence-based, targeted strategies to improve school climate:

- Emphasis on resiliency: Help at-risk students use school and community-based supports to build upon their unique strengths

- School-wide focus: Adopt community-wide practices to build character and support appropriate student behavior

- Response to Intervention Model: Use diverse and increasingly intensive approaches to support students academically

- Data-driven: Track and analyze school data that goes beyond test scores and includes perceptions of key school climate indicators

- Relationship-focused: Connect every student to at least one caring adult

- Curricular-based: Ensure that curriculum promotes social, emotional, and civic competencies alongside content-area competencies

- Coordinated: Build systems to link educators, students, parents and caregivers, and the community to create schools that are safe and caring

Several evidence based tools already exist to measure and assess student and educator perceptions of school climate. The School Climate Survey, for example, assesses students' perceptions in seven areas: achievement motivation; fairness; order and discipline; parent involvement; sharing of resources; student interpersonal relationships, and student-teacher relationships. Other surveys measure indicators such as opportunity for input, community cohesiveness, trust, respect, and caring.

In Reading, the RIZE Program has shown us that the arts can be a powerful tool in preventing domestic violence. Additional best practices include PASELA (Promoting and Supporting Early Literacy through the Arts) model, which has shown results in Bethlehem; the Harlem Children's Zone;and Big Thought of Dallas, Texas.

Action Plan

Month 1-2

Key administrators from the Reading School District and the City of Reading work in collaboration with the Reading Education Association, PSEA and community-based violence-prevention groups such as the Mayor's Youth Violence Coalition (formerly the 222 Corridor Anti-Gang Initiative), the Reading Youth Violence Prevention (RVYP) Planning Project, and the Reading Communities that Care (CTC).

- Review and launch the youth development and violence prevention framework and draft action plan crafted in early 2010.

Month 3-5

RSD, REA and partners develop evidence-based programs to increase student achievement by improving school climate, including:

- Broad-based accountability systems

- Standards for school climate, measurement tools, and resources and technical assistance to help all schools meet school climate standards

- Research-based anti-bullying and resiliency-building programs

- School-wide positive behavior support programs to encourage appropriate behavior among students

Month 6+

- Support community schools models that bring health, social, and other services into the school to meet the multiple and complex needs of students related to health and well-being

- Develop successful models and professional development to help educators build systems to ensure every student will have a supportive relationship with at least one adult in school

Success Indicators

- Reduced violence and bullying

- Increased resiliency factors

4. Increase parental engagement with a continuum of academic, family, and community supports

Parents are their children's first and best teachers, yet in 2006, 46.9% of births in Reading were to mothers without a high school degree, and an estimated 70% of children entering kindergarten lacked one or more of the basic life skills needed to be successful in school. Effective schools must be at the heart of a full array of programs and services that support parenting education and engagement. We cannot let cultural, linguistic or socioeconomic issues be an excuse for inaction or the perpetuation of unfair and inaccurate assumptions about low-income families. Rather, schools and community organizations must reach out early and often to address the stereotypes and mythologies that degrade our ability to respect and appreciate our differences.

They must also--in collaboration with community programs--provide a seamless continuum of support throughout the dozen or more years each child is in school.

We recommend a variety of programs to support parenting education and parental involvement in their children's education, including the Baby College Program hosted by United Way, the Reading Opportunity Center for Children, a redesigned Parent Outreach Advocates program, and community-wide improvement in communication.

• The **Baby College Program** in Reading is a successful parenting education and support model for families of children 0-3 years of age, originally developed under the United Way's "Right from the Start Initiative" and modeled on the well-known Harlem Children's Zone. It must be expanded so that every parent can provide a home environment that will not disadvantage their children before they even begin their education in public school. It should also collaborate with the Reading Opportunity Center for Children, particularly the ROCC's parental engagement initiatives, to ensure consistency and continuity for children and parent.

• The Reading School District's new **Reading Opportunity Center for Children (**ROCC) provides much-needed information, orientation, and training as well as a welcoming "one-stop" service provider for city families. The district must fully implement and expand planned ROCC programs, including the Parent Academy, before the end of 2010, developing multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, language accessible community partnerships wherever possible. The ROCC is already an excellent model and stands to become an example for school districts nationwide.

• The **Reading Family Literacy Program**, now within ROCC, has, for 20 years, been successfully serving the literacy needs of low-income families with young children within the Reading School District. The state-funded program tracks students from early childhood through 3rd grade, and serves as a feeder system for the Parent Academy.

Parents need to feel welcome at their child's school, with opportunities for active involvement and leadership. Special efforts are needed to include low-income parents, those for whom English is not their first language and those who may not be accustomed to participation in the educational system. Parent Outreach Assistants (POAs) are currently employed by the school district as liaisons between parents and schools, although parents report inconsistent experiences with the program, including an absence of POAs at critical times and places. We recommend that, rather than reporting to school principals, POAs should be clearly designated as child- and parent-advocates, reporting directly to the Reading Opportunity Center for Children.

Communication must be dramatically improved between parents, students, teachers, administrators and educational programs outside of school. A comprehensive mapping of available services should be developed and made widely available to the community from central locations such as the ROCC, Berks Community Action Program (BCAP), United Way and Centro Hispano. Decentralized communication should also be promoted via a wide network of smaller neighborhood based sites like schools, churches, and libraries. Such venues must also be made far more widely available for positive youth and family events and activities.

Best Practices

Training, technical assistance and funding is now available through the federal Promise Neighborhoods program (again based on the Harlem Children's Zone), a new initiative to break the cycle of generational poverty by improving the educational outcomes and overall life prospects of low-income children and their families. Clearly, Reading has a compelling story to tell and case for support to make. We did not submit a proposal to the Promise Neighborhoods program this year due to time constraints, since extensive research and much greater community commitment is needed, but we see this exciting opportunity as a call to action and plan to submit a proposal during the next funding cycle.

Action Plan

Month 1-3

• The Reading School District funds and empowers the Reading Opportunity Center for Children (ROCC) to become a comprehensive "one-stop" service provider for city families with children, supporting, the Parent Academy, Family Literacy as well as other programs

• REA/PSEA Community Committee continues to work with all stakeholders on its Parental Engagement Initiative

• Review of POA responsibilities and reporting structure

• Planning begins for Promise Neighborhoods application

Month 4-6

• The ROCC becomes an informational link and support system for all parental engagement initiatives in Reading, including Baby College, BCAP, Centro Hispano and other groups

• If appropriate, realignment of POA responsibilities and reporting structure

• Promise Neighborhoods coalition formed through ROCC and PSEA/REA Community Committee

Month 7+

• Promise Neighborhood Application developed

• Ongoing coordinated parental engagement efforts

Success Indicators

- Number of families and children served by the ROCC

- Number of Parent Academy graduates

- Number of POAs and POA-parent contacts

- Number of families and children served by Baby College

5. Start early with language/literacy, cultural diversity and the arts

Language/literacy, cultural diversity, and the arts must be infused into all new and existing efforts at the earliest levels to increase interest and maximize their impact on our students and the life of our city.

- Use the arts to help children become conversationally proficient in Spanish and English before 5th grade

- Identify and expand promising arts programs that provide academic outcomes

- Implement a citywide Arts Residency Program that utilizes our extraordinarily talented local artists

The city is already rich in arts, music and theater, with a host of organizations doing wonderful work to enrich our community. Some include education as an important part of their mission--notably the Yocum Institute, the Reading Public Museum and GoggleWorks--and we hope that their work can be expanded to address the needs of the urban poor. Grassroots programs are already achieving some of the recommended goals, including

- **"Orchestra Zone"** based in the Venezuelan "El Sistema" which operates in partnership with the Reading School District and the Reading Symphony Orchestra, teaching kids year-round to play musical instruments

- **Neighborhood Bridges,** a program from the Children's Theatre Company of Minneapolis is approved by the U.S. Department of Education as an effective model. The Yocum Institute for Arts Education is certified and has provided these programs in Reading schools on a small scale with great success.

Recently announced transitions in the leadership of at least three significant organizations – Reading Public Museum, Berks Arts Council, and the GoggleWorks – present immediate opportunities for new approaches that more inclusively emphasize the needs, and gifts, of inner city children and families.

We must also promote language and literacy for youth and adults throughout the city with well coordinated and publicized efforts, by building much better overall ESL and ELL instruction capacity. Before 5th grade, all students in the City of Reading should have the tools to become conversationally proficient in Spanish and English.

Best Practices

The arts have effectively been used to promote literacy, create community and raise both educational achievement levels and quality of life perception in communities throughout the nation. The Orchestra Zone and Neighborhood Bridges programs reflect our own Best Practices, along with the impressive grassroots RIZE Program. The PASELA model (Promoting and Supporting Early Literacy through the Arts) has shown good results in Bethlehem.

Action Plan

Month 1-3

- Designate an organization to lead initiative, such as the Yocum Institute

- Identify representatives from arts organizations to serve on a Arts/Literacy committee

- Prepare for the Education Summit:

- create materials that promote the facts behind the connectivity of the arts, literacy, drop out rates and educational academic success

- survey school principals and administration to identify all arts and literacy focused programs that are active within the Reading School District

Month 4 (Education Summit)

- Educate education stakeholders about potential of arts in education

- Launch Arts/Literacy initiative

Month 5-6

- Evaluate effectiveness of existing programs in meeting goals

- Hold open forum with feedback on findings

- Develop an Arts/Literacy strategic plan using feedback from Summit, evaluations and other sources; plan includes budget, funding sources and metrics

Month 7+

- Implement Strategic Plan

- Launch Arts Residency Program

Success Indicators

- Growth of Orchestra Zone and Neighborhood Bridges programs

- Increased literacy rates among children in arts programs

- Number of children fluent in Spanish and English by 5th grade

Improving educational attainment is a mandatory high-value strategy.

--Ride to Prosperity: Strategies for Economic Competitiveness in Greater Reading

6. Enhance academic and work readiness

The 2006-2008 American Community Survey, based on U.S. Census data, found that less than 65% of Reading residents age 25 or older were high school graduates, compared to the national level of 84.5%, and only 10.9% of our residents had a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to the national level of 27.4%. This is no way to enter the workforce. We recommend that the Reading School District—in collaboration with community agencies, local employers and institutions of higher learning—identify and train our students in the skills and knowledge needed for competitive post-secondary readiness. Moreover, the approach must be culturally and linguistically appropriate to our majority Latino population.

The youth of today represent the workforce of tomorrow, and the development of this valuable resource is paramount to the recovery of the economy in Reading. We all agree that our youth deserve every advantage as they strive to distinguish themselves in a competitive job market. But young people living in poverty frequently lack both academic and work readiness skills and thus their self-confidence and economic marketability is diminished. We know anecdotally from local employers, career and technical schools, and colleges and university administrators that far too many Reading High School (RHS) graduates come to them lacking the requisite

social skills, job training preparation, and academic and work readiness skills. Both the public and private sectors can do much more to help our students meet the world successfully without suffering from a competitive disadvantage. This recommendation is closely linked with #4 under Economic Development: *Expand industry partnerships for workforce development*.

Reading High School must work with parents and students to understand why so many of its graduates lack not only proficiency in reading, writing and speaking English language but the requisite social skills to compete at the post-secondary level. According to community testimony, poor and Latino students are led to believe that very little is expected of them. We must raise the bar, expecting much from our children and holding students, parents and educators accountable for delivering measurable results.

We must also reduce the gap in academic achievement between those who graduate from the Reading School District and those who are educated in the surrounding suburban districts. The costing-out study, as noted above, revealed, in the 2005-06 academic year, a $6,437 discrepancy between what is spent per pupil in the Reading School District ($7,458) and what is deemed necessary for adequate yearly progress ($13,8960). While state aid is distributed so that poorer districts receive more funding per pupil than wealthy districts, the effect of this aid is overwhelmed by local wealth discrepancies, since local revenues are also required for school funding. Services provided to youth might include:

- Tutoring, study skills training, and dropout prevention activities

- Alternative secondary school services

- Summer employment opportunities

- Paid and unpaid work experiences

- Occupational skills training

- Referrals re: developmental delays and learning disabilities

- Leadership development activities

- Adult mentoring

- Comprehensive guidance and counseling

- Support and follow-up services

Education opportunities must be expanded beyond minimum requirements for obtaining a high school diploma. In particular, the Reading School District must increase and formalize relationships with local companies and institutions of higher education to identify the skill and knowledge sets needed for competitive post-secondary readiness.

Best Practices

The Berks Business Education Coalition and the Higher Education Council of Berks County are working together on a program addressing post-secondary readiness; this should be expanded immediately. There must also be stronger partnerships between RHS and RACC to provide more enrichment and remediation courses in key areas. All local institutions of higher education should work to establish Summer "Bridge" Programs for Reading's at-risk and underrepresented students in grades 9-12 in order to increase exposure to the college environment and thus overall academic readiness.

These dovetail with Summer Youth Employment programs, which are widely recognized as a cost-effective strategy for increasing employability while fighting seasonal increases in crime and delinquency. Best practices include the Richmond (California) Summer Youth Employment Program and the Mayor's Youth Employment and Education Program in San Francisco. In Berks County, the Workforce Investment Board funds youth programs including the United Community Services Pre-Apprenticeship Program, which begins in 9th grade and includes YouthBuild (for out of school youth) to prepare them to enter apprenticeship programs. The WIB also hosts a summer youth employment program, but many think that it lacks vision, vigor, capacity, and communication/coordination with the full spectrum of providers who work with inner city youth. Meanwhile, a potential local best practice model was implemented here earlier this year. Goodwill's GoodGuides Mentoring Program, directed by Rebuilding Reading member Zylkia Rivera and based at the Berks County Community Foundation building, focuses on preparation for various careers.

Priority must also be given to non-traditional and returning adult students, including those with lower literacy and levels of English proficiency. One excellent best practice is the Latino Initiative of the Lancaster County Workforce Investment Board. We can also learn from successful targeted training programs and multi-organizational partnerships such as Proyecto Siembra and the Langan Allied Health Academy. These models could form the basis for even more comprehensive programs in which academic and career preparation is integrated with a full spectrum of support and follow-up services--such as the New Hope Project, which has a long, strong track record of anti-poverty impact in Milwaukee's large Latino community.

Action Plan

Month 1-2

- Establish a planning committee including representatives from the Reading School District, public and private social service agencies, local employers and institutions of higher learning

- Coordinate with key individuals in the community already working on workforce development

- Establish program goals and select the target population

Month 3-6

- Design comprehensive program and create program unit components such as resources and facilities

- Select or develop curricula and session plans

- Select or develop and evaluation tool to measure outcomes

Month 7-12+

- Facilitate adoption, implementation, and maintenance

- Ongoing selection and training

Success Indicators

- Decreased poverty rates in participating families

- Increased employment and earnings among participants

- Reduced barriers to employment (e.g., lack of access to childcare, an inadequate employment history, literacy and/or English language proficiency issues)

- Improved school performance in children and youth

- Reduced behavior problems in children and youth

- Increased enrollment in childcare centers

- Increased participation in extracurricular and out-of-school activities

On a policy level, the main reason why urban reinvestment policies are not as successful as they need to be is in large part because leadership and management responsibilities are dispersed among too many parties, and this dispersion leads to an ineffective use of available resources.

--John Kromer, *Fixing Broken Cities*

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Policy and Governance

These recommendations are addressed to City Hall and designed to achieve fundamental changes in the way we do business in Reading. Implemented effectively, they will dramatically improve, in the immediate and long term, not only city services but the quality of life in the community at large.

1. Improve fast-tracking, standardization and accountability of city services

The City of Reading must prepare itself for implementing the Act 47 Recovery Plan, the Rebuilding Reading proposals, and for governing into the future **by establishing and executing a comprehensive quality management system (QMS)** that reaches throughout all city operations. At present, obstacles to efficient policy execution--including the lack of appropriate standardization and fast tracking, monitoring and evaluation--burden virtually all city operations. Many of the recommendations proposed in this report make additional demands on city officials, including implementation guidelines, responsibility assignments, goals/targets, and other important details. The Act 47 Recovery Plan already calls for performance measurements in nearly every aspect of city operations, making the need for an improved approach a high priority in addressing all of Reading's challenges. This recommendation reinforces suggests further advances to such a system that will help officials handle the added work of reversing the current conditions while maintaining the regular responsibilities of running the city.

We also recommend a competent and fair-minded **evaluation of all existing boards, commissions, and advisory committees to the Mayor and City Council**. This recommendation links directly to #1 under Economic Development, particularly the creation of an Economic and Community Development Plan, and can be accomplished within one year. According to the official City of Reading website, there are forty-one Boards, Authorities and Commissions. These boards, particularly the Planning Commission, Redevelopment Authority and Parking Authority Boards, need clearer direction on how to make city reinvestment goals their highest priority.

The survey proposed here will reveal where duplication of effort and financial waste can be addressed better serve the residents, business owners and service users of the City of Reading. It will highlight the inherent strengths and weaknesses of these entities, identify service gaps and overlapping missions, and determine whether the

missions, priorities and goals of these entities are aligned with those of the city as a whole, as articulated in the Economic and Community Development Plan. Dysfunctional boards, authorities or commissions may be disbanded or reconfigured, and those with overlapping missions, such as the Local Redevelopment Authority and the Reading Redevelopment Authority, could be merged to eliminate competition for the same resources. This policy can be successfully implemented in 1 to 2 years.

Best Practices

A primary requirement necessary to provide for this condition is the **establishment and execution of a comprehensive quality management system (QMS)** that reaches throughout all city operations. A quality management system will, as it sounds, build quality into every aspect of city services and infrastructure management, offering a structured set of procedures to confidently carry out all anti-poverty initiatives. A QMS demands that all decisions be based on facts and data, not opinions, provides incremental yet continual increases in quality, and makes the people who do the work responsible for improving their work processes.

Sincequality must be quantified in order to be properly managed and continually improved, a critical step in setting up a QMS is to **define a set of standardized performance measures**. Performance measures will track the outcomes defined by the quality management system to show where improvements are occurring and where they still need to be made. Once the performance measures are established, the city should integrate performance management accountability practices, such as the *CitiStat* program. This will offer both officials and the public regular analysis of the status of efforts and allow for informed preventive and corrective action.

The case for and structure of an effective QMS is articulated in *The Price of Government* by Peter Osbourne and Peter Huchinson. This book provides a wealth of tools and lessons for muncipal managers and should become a well-referenced resource for the City of Reading in their efforts to improve performance and accountability. The City of Philadelphia is successfully implementing their own form of the program, entitled PhillyStat, and holds regular meetings to report on and plan for continuous improvement.

Action Plan

Month 1-3

- Under the direction of John Kromer and David Kersley, utilize Act 47 coordinator resources to design a comprehensive evaluation of city operations, including all boards, commissions and advisory committees

- Establish performance indicators as required by recovery plan as part of an integrated quality management system

- Establish a strategic review committee to monitor activities and evaluate outcomes

Month 4-8

- Conduct comprehensive evaluation

Month 9-12

- Restructure city operations as appropriate, integrating performance measures and accountability practices

Year 1+

- Maintenance, preventative and corrective measures

Success Indicators

Monthly status reports of strategic review committee detailing activity of all departments assigned performance indicators

Regular reports to Council and the public documenting progress on all identified performance measures

2. Reorient the city procurement and hiring preference towards city businesses and residents

Having a healthy local economy filled with thriving small businesses and family-sustaining jobs will have a major impact on reducing poverty in Reading. The more of the city's annual contracts and purchasing that remain in the city, the more revenue will be retained by city businesses, enabling them to improve and expand, creating jobs and increasing business to business commerce. Likewise, the more city workers hired from the local workforce, the more families in our neighborhoods will be able to sustain a greater quality of life through decent employment opportunities.

This dynamic is known as the *economic multiplier*: a dollar spent locally is more likely to recirculate within a community several times, creating another dollar of wealth each time with the purchase or production of additional local goods and services. If all purchasing is done with firms outside of the community, then the money spent immediately leaves the community and recirculates elsewhere, with no secondary stimulus of the local economy. Reading's goal, therefore, should be to *maximize its economic multiplier* as much as possible. To maximize this economic multiplier as much as possible, the city must make both procurement of goods and services from local businesses and hiring of workers from the local workforce a priority.

Similar initiatives can be instituted for establishing a hiring preference for the local workforce. Across the county, **first source local hiring** ordinances are being adopted to address this. A first source hiring policy requires firms awarded substantial city contracts, grants, subsidies, or other direct support to commit to preferential hiring of low-income city residents.

To reinforce this policy with vendors and contractors, the city itself should also institute the practice. There has been a major debate in recent years of the potential to reinstate a residency requirement for city workers, which would make residency mandatory for all municipal employees. A first source local hiring policy would provide for many of the benefits of a residency requirement (as well as broadening it to vendors and contractors) without completely restricting outside recruitment of qualified workers.

Tax credits could be offered to any company with a business license to further local hiring within the city. This has been done successfully in many cities and could provide just enough incentive for additional job creation within some firms.

Best Practices

Many cities have helped local businesses compete for government contracts by instituting a **5-10% bidding preference**. Studies of statewide local purchasing efforts in Arizona have shown that three times the amount of money spent was found to recirculate in the local economy instead of immediately crossing state lines. Reading had a 10% bid preference in effect at some point, but it was dropped following lack of enforcement.

The City of San Francisco recently updated their first source policy to widen the scope of its applicability: *The intent of First Source is to connect low-income San Francisco residents with entry-level jobs that are generated by the City's investment in contracts or public works; or by business activity that requires approval by the City's Planning Department or permits by the Department of Building Inspection.*

In 2002 the City of Philadelphia instituted a Job Creation Tax Credit implementing this incentive, offering "credit against its Business Privilege tax liability equal to the higher of 2% of annual wages paid for each new job or $1,000 per new job created."

Action Plan

Month 1-3

- Institute administrative changes to procurement policies for no-bid contracts and small purchases

- Examine possible ordinance requirement for certain RFP levels; conduct review of law by Solicitor

Month 4-6

- Provide comprehensive documentation and government contract training for local businesses

- Develop a registry of local businesses for procurement decisions (which could be maintained by or coordinated with outside agencies)

- Develop a registry of qualified local residents for hiring decisions (which could be maintained by or coordinated with outside agencies)

Month 7+

- Conduct regular monitoring and reporting of levels of local purchasing achieved annually

Success Indicators

- Annual percentage of contracts awarded to local businesses

- Annual amount of discretionary spending (no contract) spent with local businesses

- Annual percentage of positions offered to local residents

3. Restructure the city's public finance system to incentivize economic growth

Reading needs a major increase in the number of businesses, jobs, real estate investments, and tourists. The current array of taxes and fees, however, directly discourage these assets, and can even be seen as penalties for such activity. While the city certainly needs revenue streams to provide essential public services and infrastructure investments, the methods used to raise public money are just as important as what it is spent on.

In addition to discouraging private enterprise, many of the city's taxes and fees disproportionately burden low-income residents. A study done by the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy in 2003 identified Pennsylvania as one of the *10 most regressive states* in the nation when considering the impact of the entire tax burden. In other words, low-income residents pay a larger proportion of their income in taxes that higher income residents, which reduces both their buying power and ability to save. Although Reading cannot independently address the overarching regressivity of PA tax policy, it can take important steps to reduce the local tax burden of low-income city residents.

To address both of these challenges, the City of Reading should **phase out its current mix of Act 511 taxes** and **replace the revenue with a land value tax**. A land value tax is an improved form of the property tax that levies an increasing amount of tax revenue from land values. Since land is in fixed supply, raising taxes on it will not reduce the tax base or drive away business, especially when done in conjunction with a comprehensive draw-down of all other taxes. Additionally, because low-income residents generally own either no land or land of little value, their tax burden will drop over time as current taxes are phased out and a land value tax is phased in. This process should follow the established procedures and timeline of the recovery plan, which provides the specific steps for the process, and can be effectively implemented within one year.

To quote from the Act 47 Recovery Plan approved by City Council:

In view of the potential benefits and the challenges involved, the City shall convene a working group to review the viability of changing its property tax to a Land Value Tax or split-rate system. The Business Analyst shall assume responsibility for coordinating the group's activities. Other participants shall include the Finance Director or his/her designee, the City Council President or his/her designee, a representative from the Act 47 Community Committee (which has already done significant research on this subject) and other community stakeholders selected by the Mayor and City Council. Representatives from Berks County and the Reading School District shall be invited to participate.

The group will evaluate the Land Value Tax or split-rate system, consider the advantages and disadvantages of a shift to such a system (including quantifying increased or decreased tax payments associated with the shift) and implementation challenges, such as the assessment, billing, collection and communicating potential changes to tax payers. In view of the many other initiatives that the City must accomplish to establish basic stability and financial management tools, the group's work shall begin in fall 2010 with a final report provided to the Mayor, Council and Act 47 Coordinator by spring 2011.

This policy is particularly important now because of Reading's Act 47 status as a city in fiscal distress. As it seeks new forms of revenue, it should avoid any tax increases that would further drive away businesses and jobs or create additional hardship for its poorest residents. One of the policies being considered to help fill the deficit is a local option sales tax, which would further broaden the most regressive tax in the state, even after the exemptions on food, clothing, and medicines.

The city has already moved in the right direction with the establishment of a Local Economic Revitalization Tax Assistance (LERTA) program, which was adopted "as a means of enticing development and/or the rehabilitation of deteriorated property within the City boundaries." This approach, also known as the 10 year tax abatement program, has worked remarkably well in Philadelphia to attract reinvestment, especially of vacant and underdeveloped properties. However, under LERTA, the abatement is only available to property owners that apply for it for new improvements and is phased out over 10 years. This limits its application through the added administrative process necessary to benefit and excludes the tens of thousands of existing property owners who have maintained and improved their properties for many years.

A land value tax would be automatic in that all new improvements would be enrolled by default, universal in that it is retroactive to all existing properties, and permanent because it would never be phased out. In these ways, land value taxation would better benefit the low- and fixed income property owners by providing them with increasing levels of tax relief while shifting the burden to the most blighted and vacant properties.

Best Practices

The City of Allentown adopted the land value tax in 1997 and codified it in the city charter as the primary revenue source for all future tax levy increases by freezing existing Act 511 taxes at their current rates:

Beginning in 1997, the City of Allentown will adopt a property taxation system designed to encourage development of new properties and improvements to existing properties. The system will accomplish this by gradually reducing the tax rate applied to all buildings relative to the tax rate applied to all land (whether developed or undeveloped). (Art. VIII, §807)

Allentown has had significant success with the program ever since. Reading can take similar action, either through a change in the ordinance or fully amending the city charter. It is important to also move to freeze Act 511 taxes in a similar way to demonstrate commitment to a new public finance model that is both pro-enterprise and anti-poverty in nature. A preliminary study done by the Center for the Study of Economics in 2009 estimated that a shift to the land value tax using the building abatement method could reduce property tax burden for 80% of residential properties.

Action Plan

Month 1-6

- Establish a task force charged as mandated by the Act 47 Recovery Plan to review the feasibility of a land value tax shift; David Kersley as coordinator

- Review 2010 tax data and formulate a land value tax shift scenario

Month 7-12

- Hold discussions with the city solicitor, county commissioners, and school district regarding reassessment, rate harmonization, and coterminous jurisdiction tax collection

- Review the potential for a citywide reassessment to accurately reflect the tax base

- Adopt the ordinance and/or charter change enacting the shift after Solicitor review

Success Indicators

- Amount of annual revenue from land values; should increase each year

- Amount of annual revenue from regressive local taxes (wage, property, per-capita taxes); should decrease each year

4. Build sustainability into city infrastructure and services to protect against commodity price shocks and foster a green economy

The effect of fluctuating oil costs on the cost of living demonstrates the impact of energy on all sectors of the economy and exposes the vulnerability of the poor and those on fixed incomes to such "price shocks." The recession has tempered the demand for energy, but the eventual recovery will once again drive up global demand for oil and other natural resources, impacting the cost of food, energy, transportation, and other essential human needs. Some of these challenges are already on the horizon. For example, PA electric utility rate caps in the Reading area are scheduled to come off within a year, which will raise the cost of electricity for city residents up to 25-30%. Such dramatic shifts in the cost of living are just as burdensome, especially to low-income families, as a reduction in wages and benefits.

The City of Reading must make sustainable development a priority to protect its population against price shocks from

economic cycles, climate change, and other powerful forces that will challenge communities in the coming years. Like improving the quality of city services, managing environmental impact can be best accomplished through a structured, systematic approach. To do so, the city should establish an Environmental Management System (EMS) such as ISO 14001. This EMS will compliment the QMS and offer a similar way of building sustainability into city services and infrastructure development and maintenance. This policy can be started immediately, with full implementation in 3 to 5 years.

With an EMS in place, the city will be able to effectively identify and understand areas of both its environmental impact on nature and the the impact of a changing environment on the city. This means, for example, understanding how the many waste streams generated by city life risk soil, air, and water quality and as a result degrade community health, or how current municipal practices demand growing use of water, landfills, or water treatment, thus driving up the cost of government. With an understanding of these impacts, the City of Reading can adapt its services and upgrade its infrastructure to incrementally yet continuously become more water, energy, space, and waste efficient.

Such an effort will generate a significant need for people and organizations specializing in sustainability skills. To meet this inevitable demand, the city should pursue every source of green jobs funding to train its labor force and put them to work in both the public and private sectors. Many green collar jobs are being identified to provide essential sustainability work while offering low barriers to entry. For example, city workforce development focus on the areas of energy and water conservation, land restoration, sustainable food production, and zero-waste management can build a skilled workforce capable of addressing many of our local challenges and developing broader solutions through local enterprises. This combination provides perhaps the best opportunity for large-scale job creation that both rebuilds Reading's middle class while best-preparing it for the challenges of the 21st century.

Best Practices

The Sustainable Business Network of Greater Philadelphia provides excellent resources in the areas of green industry and job opportunities as part of its Emerging Industries Project and Green Economy Task Force. These two efforts are working in conjunction to identify and connect the opportunities and resources that already exist in the Greater Philadelphia area, and much of this infrastructure can be adapted to the Greater Reading area as well. Additionally, significant local work has been produced as part of the 2006 report Reinventing Reading, which includes a comprehensive analysis of the city's current conditions in the many areas of sustainability and provides a wealth of solutions using the Natural Step framework.

Action Plan

Year 1

- Coordinate with school district and area colleges to develop sustainability literacy and skills of students

- Allocate economic development resources to assist local businesses in adopting sustainable practices and hiring green collar workers

Year 2

- Shift tax incentives for sustainable activities through environmental taxes and fees

- Increase support for and role of the city Environmental Advisory Council

Year 3+

- Integrate sustainability agenda into city code whenever possible and consider the environmental aspects of all future policies

Success Indicators

- Resource (land, water, energy, waste removal, etc.) consumption/quality rates

- Green job creation rate

Appendix A:
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HUD Good Neighbor Next Door
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gnndabot.cfm

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Alvernia University
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Jeffrey S. Waltman
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Appendix B:

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default.aspx?id=145697
• Professional Continuing Education: http://www.ccac.edu/
default.aspx?id=145701
• Public Safety Institute: http://www.ccac.edu/default.
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training, marketing, networking and consulting services to
local businesses and other organizations committed to triple
bottom approaches to serve the needs of people, planet, and
profit. www.sustainableberks.org

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Appendix C:

GLOSSARY

Act 47. The Financially Distressed Municipalities Act (Act of 1987, P.L. 246, No. 47), also known as Act 47, empowers the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development to declare certain municipalities as financially distressed. It provides for the restructuring of debt of financially distressed municipalities, limits the ability of financially distressed municipalities to obtain government funding; authorizes municipalities to participate in Federal debt adjustment actions and bankruptcy actions under certain circumstances; and provides for consolidation or merger of contiguous municipalities to relieve financial distress.

Act 47 Community Committee. A diverse coalition of Reading area residents working together to address the city's economic distress by developing a community-focused recovery plan and working with Act 47 administrators to ensure that the final plan was consistent with community needs and interests.

Act 511 taxes. A variety of taxes defined by the Local Tax Enabling Act of 1965 (53 P.S. §6913), including the earned income tax and net profits tax.

ADA. Americans with Disabilities Act, U.S. civil-rights law, enacted 1990, that forbids discrimination of various sorts against persons with physical or mental handicaps. Its primary emphasis is on enabling these persons to enter the job market and remain employed, but it also outlaws most physical barriers in public accommodations, transportation, telecommunications, and government services.

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). A measurement defined by the United States federal No Child Left Behind Act that allows the U.S. Department of Education to determine how every public school and school district in the country is performing academically according to results on standardized tests.

Adopt a Block. Any of a variety of programs dedicated to improving the quality of life and revitalizing the economy of a specific neighborhood, one block at a time.

AmeriCorps. A set of programs at the state and national level that support local service programs that engage thousands of Americans in intensive service to meet critical community needs. Each year, AmeriCorps offers 75,000 opportunities for adults of all ages and backgrounds to serve through a network of partnerships with local and national nonprofit groups.

Baby College. A program originating with the Harlem Children's Zone and implemented throughout the country. Baby College programs typically involve parenting workshops to expectant parents and those raising a child up to three years old. Among other lessons, the workshops promote reading to children and verbal discipline over corporal punishment.

Berks Business Education Coalition (BBEC). A non-profit organization of business leaders and educators seeking to improve educational, vocational and skills training programs in Berks County schools. BBEC

To coordinate the resources of the business community in partnership with the education community, toward selective initiatives that will improve student competency.

Berks Community Action Program (BCAP). Provides payments for rent, mortgage arrearage for home and trailer owners, rental costs for trailers and trailer lots, security deposits, and utilities to prevent and/or end homelessness or near homelessness by maintaining individuals and families in their own residences. Emphasis should be placed on the prevention of homelessness for families with children.

Berks County Community Foundation. BCCF was founded in 1994 to help individuals, families, organizations and businesses achieve their charitable objectives. Since that time, the foundation has grown to manage more than 400 charitable funds valued at nearly $50 million. Each year, those funds distribute more than $2 million in scholarships and grants to support local students and nonprofit organizations and causes.

Berks County Intermediate Unit (BCIU). An educational service agency providing programs and services to public school districts, nonpublic schools, and other human service organizations of Berks County, Pennsylvania. The BCIU also is a liaison agent between the schools and the Pennsylvania Department of Education.

Berks County Workforce Investment Board (WIB). The purpose of the Berks County Workforce Investment Board is to identify the long-term, strategic workforce development needs of the community; propose strategies to meet those needs; set priorities; build partnerships to align resources in support of those strategies; test specific initiatives to advance those ends; and measure and evaluate results.

Best practice. A best practice is a technique, method, process, activity, incentive, or reward which conventional wisdom regards as more effective at delivering a particular outcome than any other technique, method, process, etc. when applied to a particular condition or circumstance. The idea is that with proper processes, checks, and testing, a desired outcome can be delivered with fewer problems and unforeseen complications. Best practices can also be defined as the most efficient (least amount of effort) and effective (best results) way of accomplishing a task, based on repeatable procedures that have proven themselves over time for large numbers of people.

Blighted property. Buildings and lots in an extreme state of neglect and disrepair fall under the category of "blighted property." Most municipalities have laws against this kind of deterioration that help outline the maintenance obligations of property owners.

Building code. A building code (or codes) is a set of rules that specify the minimum acceptable level of safety for constructed objects such as buildings and non-building structures. The main purpose of building codes is to protect public health, safety and general welfare as they relate to the construction and occupancy of buildings and structures. The building code becomes law of a particular jurisdiction when formally enacted by the appropriate authority.

Business Jump Start Center. A small business incubator hosted by the Berks County Community Foundation, where it is housed, and the Kutztown University Small Business Development Center.

Community Development Block Grant (CDBG). The Community Development Block Grant program is a flexible program that provides communities with resources to address a wide range of unique community development needs. Beginning in 1974, the CDBG program is one of the longest continuously run programs at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

Community Land Trust. A nonprofit corporation which acquires and manages land on behalf of the residents of a place-based community, while preserving affordability and preventing foreclosures for any housing located upon its land.

Community Prevention Partnership. Established in 1992 through a federal grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's Center for Substance Abuse Prevention, the Community Prevention Partnership of Berks County offers a variety of prevention services that address problems and risks associated with: alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs; violence; teen pregnancy; abuse; crime; school dropout; and other related social issues.

Costing out study. Commissioned and funded by in 2006 by the Pennsylvania General Assembly and then-Governor Rendell, the state's first costing-out study was designed to understand what it costs for all students Pennsylvania public schools – no matter where they live – to receive a quality education allowing them to meet state standards for academic achievement. By understanding these costs, the state can adjust its funding system to close the gap between high-spending and low-spending school districts.

In 2006, the base cost for providing a high quality public education was $8,003 per pupil.

Cultural competence. Cultural competence refers to an ability to interact effectively with people of different cultures. Cultural competence comprises an awareness of one's own cultural worldview, attitude towards cultural differences, knowledge of different cultural practices and worldviews, and cross-cultural skills. Developing cultural competence results in an ability to understand, communicate with, and effectively interact with people across cultures.

Dashboard. A management tool, that, like an automobile's dashboard, organizes and presents information in a way that is easy to read.

Downtown 20/20 Revitalization Project. A plan designed to eliminate blighting influences, improve pedestrian safety, improve emergency vehicle reaction time, and stabilize the economic activity within Reading's downtown district in order to attract new businesses and create more jobs.

Economic multiplier. In economics, the multiplier effect is the idea that an initial amount of spending leads to increased consumption spending and so results in an increase in community income greater than the initial amount of spending. In other words, a dollar spent locally is more likely to recirculate within a community several times, creating another dollar of wealth each time with the purchase or production of additional local goods and services.

Education Improvement Tax Credit (EITC). Tax credits to eligible businesses contributing to a Scholarship Organization, an Educational Improvement Organization, and/or a Pre-Kindergarten Scholarship Organization.

ELL. English language Learner. Various terms have been used to describe or characterize children whose second language is English, including Limited English Proficiency (LEP), English is a Second Language (ESL), or Second Language Learners (SLL). Currently educators refer to these children as English Language Learners (ELLs), a shift in language that represents a more accurate reflection of the process of language acquisition. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics the ELL student population now comprises more than 10% of all students.

Elm Street. The Elm Street Program was created to strengthen the older historic neighborhoods that characterize many of the commonwealth's communities.

Environmental Management System (EMS). Environmental management system (EMS) refers to the management of an organization's environmental programs in a comprehensive, systematic, planned and documented manner. It includes the organizational structure, planning and resources for developing, implementing and maintaining policy for environmental protection.

ESL. ESL (English as a second language), ESOL (English for speakers of other languages), and EFL (English as a foreign language) all refer to the use or study of English by speakers with a different native language. See also ELL.

Family Savings Account (FSA). A special type of savings account designed to help low income individuals to meet their saving goals. An FSA helps users save and build cash reserves and gives them the beginnings of a financial education.

Federal poverty standards. There are two basic versions of the federal poverty measure: the poverty thresholds and the poverty guidelines. The Census Bureau issues the poverty thresholds, which are generally used for statistical purposes—for example, to estimate the number of people in poverty nationwide each year and classify them by type of residence, race, and other social, economic, and demographic characteristics. The Department of Health and Human Services issues the poverty guidelines for administrative purposes—for instance, to determine whether a person or family is eligible for assistance through various federal programs.

First source local hiring. The practice or policy of hiring local residents first, before hiring others for open positions. First source hiring typically establishes a process by which residents are given the first opportunity for jobs, as opposed to a local hiring requirement, which mandates a particular outcome, such as a percentage of positions or work hours that must be filled by local residents.

Fund for Revitalization and Economic Development (FRED). Low-interest rate gap financing to businesses that create and/or retain jobs for low- to moderate-income households. Gap financing is defined as the difference between the total project cost and the maximum amount of private financing available.

Geographic Information System (GIS) is a set of tools that captures, stores, analyzes, manages, and presents data that are linked to location(s). In the simplest terms, GIS is the merging of cartography, statistical analysis, and database technology. It allows users to view, understand,

question, interpret, and visualize data in many ways that reveal relationships, patterns, and trends in the form of maps, globes, reports, and charts.

Harlem Children's Zone. Called "one of the most ambitious social-service experiments of our time," by The New York Times, the Harlem Children's Zone Project is a unique, holistic approach to rebuilding a community so that its children can stay on track through college and go on to the job market. The goal is to create a "tipping point" in the neighborhood so that children are surrounded by an enriching environment of college-oriented peers and supportive adults, a counterweight to "the street" and a toxic popular culture that glorifies misogyny and anti-social behavior. Programs engage children from early childhood through college.

Initiative for a Competitive Greater Reading (ICGR). A market-based initiative launched in 2003 that brought together local business and community leaders to set priorities and identify ways to strengthen the competitive position of Greater Reading.

ISO 14001. The core set of international standards used for designing and implementing an effective environmental management system. The major objective of the ISO 14000 series of norms is "to promote more effective and efficient environmental management in organizations and to provide useful and usable tools - ones that are cost effective, system-based, flexible and reflect the best organizations and the best organizational practices available for gathering, interpreting and communicating environmentally relevant information."

Land Value Taxation (LVT). A type of real property taxation that, in contrast to a tax on land and improvements, taxes land at a higher rate while simultaneously reducing, or even eliminating, the tax on improvements. LVT can be a tool to promote economic justice, responsible stewardship of the earth and its resources, and as a way to promote growth where wanted.

Local Economic Development Revitalization Tax Assistance program (LERTA). Launched in 1974, LERTA is a tax assistance program designed to encourage development and/or the rehabilitation of deteriorated business properties. LERTA allows municipalities to make special tax provisions, for a limited period of time, on property improvements in blighted areas that would otherwise be subject to increased taxes.

LGBT (or GLBT) refers collectively to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people. The term LGBT is intended to reflect a diversity of sexuality and gender identity-based cultures and is sometimes used to refer to anyone who is non-heterosexual instead of exclusively to people who are homosexual, bisexual, or transgender. To recognize this inclusion, a popular variant adds the letter Q for those questioning their sexual identity (e.g., "LGBTQ").

Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC). The Local Initiatives Support Corporation is a national organization that helps local community residents transform distressed neighborhoods into healthy and sustainable communities of choice and opportunity.

Main Street. The Main Street Program is a comprehensive, community-based revitalization approach developed by the National Trust for Historic Preservation in 1980. Communities apply four prescribed components--design, promotion, organization and economic restructuring such as finding new or better purposes for Main Street enterprises. By recruiting new businesses to the city and helping existing downtown businesses expand in size, scope and number of locations, a successful Main Street Program converts unused space into productive property and sharpens the competitiveness of its businesses.

Microlending. Microcredit is the extension of very small loans (microloans) to those in poverty designed to spur entrepreneurship. These individuals lack collateral, steady employment and a verifiable credit history and therefore cannot meet even the most minimal qualifications to gain access to traditional credit. Microcredit is a part of microfinance, which is the provision of a wider range of financial services to the very poor.

National Environmental Health Association (NEHA). A national professional society of environmental health practitioners.

Neighborhood Commercial District. A designated area that promotes a concentration of businesses providing convenience goods and services to local residents. Development should be on a human scale and sensitive to impact of commerce on residents.

Neighborhood Housing Services (NHS). Neighborhood Housing Services of Greater Berks, Inc. (NHS) facilitates and provides affordable housing programs and initiatives that will expand home ownership opportunities for all people of Berks County, especially low-to moderate-income families, and will contribute to the revitalization of our neighborhoods and the greater community.

Non-discrimination ordinance. An ordinance passed in October 2009 by Reading City Council that bans discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity or expression.

Olivet Girls and Boys Club. Established in 1989, the club offers a range of safe, supervised activities and programs to young people in Reading and Berks County. Programs encourage activities with adults, peers, and family members that enable kids to enhance their self-esteem and fulfill their potential.

Orchestra Zone. Based in the Venezuelan "El Sistema" which operates in partnership with the Reading School District and the Reading Symphony Orchestra, teaching kids to play musical instruments

Our City Reading. Launched in 2001, Our City Reading is a 501C non profit corporation whose mission is to create pride and stability through home ownership to Reading's first time home buyers, to bring new high quality job opportunities to the area, and to enhance the quality of life for city and surrounding community residents.

PA CareerLink. A one-stop service for job seekers, provides job listings, directory of local offices, unemployment information, social services, and training resources.

Parent Academy. A program within the Reading Opportunity Center for Children offering parenting training and guidance to the parents and guardians of children enrolled in the Reading School District.

Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission (PHRC). The PA Human Relations Commission enforces Pennsylvania's anti-discrimination laws and promotes equal opportunity. PHRC encourages diverse workplaces,

schools and communities where differences are not just tolerated, but celebrated.

PASELA. Promoting and Supporting Early Literacy through the Arts--a partnership of parents, artists, educators and community members collaborating to create a culture in Southside Bethlehem, Pennsylvania where the arts are an integral part of all children's lives.

PENNBOC. Pennsylvania Building Officials Conference--the statewide organization for code officials in Pennsylvania, established in 1959.

Penn Corridor. The Penn Corridor is intended to be Greater Reading's hub for arts, culture, dining and entertainment. The over two-mile long Penn Corridor includes Penn Street from City Park in Reading through the downtown area and across the Penn Street Bridge to Penn Avenue, extending through West Reading and Wyomissing.

Poverty. Poverty is the lack of basic human needs, such as water, nutrition, health care, education, clothing and shelter, because of the inability to afford them. This is also referred to as absolute poverty or destitution. Relative poverty is the condition of having fewer resources or less income than others within a society or country, or compared to worldwide averages.

Poverty line. The poverty line, or threshold, is the minimum level of income deemed necessary to achieve an adequate standard of living in a given country.

Price shock. In economics, a shock is an unexpected or unpredictable event that affects an economy, either positively or negatively. If the shock is due to constrained supply it is called a supply shock and usually results in price increases for a particular product, such as oil or gas.

Promise Neighborhood. The federal Promise Neighborhoods program is a bold new initiative to break the cycle of generational poverty by improving the educational outcomes and overall life prospects of low-income children and their families. Inspired by the success of Harlem Children's Zone (HCZ), the Obama Administration has followed through on campaign promises to alleviate poverty with a national commitment to this comprehensive place-based approach to support

children from birth through college.

Pennsylvania State Education Association (PSEA). A professional association of more than 191,000 public school teachers and education support professionals, staff in state higher education institutions, nurses in health care facilities, retired educators, and college students preparing to become teachers that advocates for strong, effective public schools. PSEA bargains compensation and benefits, protects members' rights, and advocates for their professions.

Quality Management System (QMS). The organizational structure and procedure necessary to implement quality management, including quality planning, quality control, quality assurance and quality improvement. Quality management is focused not only on product/service quality, but also the means to achieve it.

Reading Area Community College (RACC). An accredited, open-enrollment, two-year institution of higher learning that provides Associate degree, Certificate and Diploma Programs, career-focused training, transitional coursework, skills training for business and industry, personal enrichment programs and public service activities.

Reading Education Association. A professional association of an estimated 1,400 teachers and education professionals that advocates for its members and on behalf of strong, effective public schools in Reading, Pennsylvania.

RHS. Reading High School

ROCC. Reading School District's new Reading Opportunity Center for Children (ROCC) provides much-needed information, orientation, and training as well as a welcoming "one-stop" service provider for city families.

RSD. Reading School District

RVYP. Reading Youth Violence Prevention program.

Ride to Prosperity. An economic development report published in June 2010 that focuses on entrepreneurship and innovation, workforce and talent development, business clusters, sits and infrastructure, and quality of place. The report is collaboration between the Berks Economic Partnership, Greater Berks Development Fund, Greater

Reading Chamber of Commerce and Industry, The Industrial Development Authority, Berks County Workforce Investment Board, The Greater Reading Visitors and Convention Bureau, The Berks County Planning Commission and the City of Reading

Schmidt Training and Technology Center. The Schmidt Center at RACC provides customized training programs that adjust to the changing needs of employers. Training courses are offered in Manufacturing Technologies, Leadership and Workforce Development, Information Technology and Workplace Readiness.

School climate. The term "school climate" refers to the character and quality of school life. It reflects multiple aspects of people's experience of school life, including: norms, goals, values; interpersonal relationships; teaching, learning; leadership practices; and organizational structures. Safe school climate indicators are directly linked to student academic performance, and a positive school climate is key to fostering healthy child development and high-level learning. Positive school climate is also associated with fewer behavioral and emotional problems for students. Research examining the impact of school climate in high-risk urban environments finds that that a supportive school climate can have a particularly strong impact on the academic success experienced by urban students, as well as greater job satisfaction among school staff and higher rates of staff retention.

Section 8 housing. The Housing Choice Voucher Program is a type of Federal assistance provided by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) dedicated to sponsoring subsidized housing for low-income families and individuals. It is more commonly known as Section 8, in reference to the portion of the U.S. Housing and Community Development Act of 1974 under which the original subsidy program was authorized.

Small business incubator. Business incubators are programs designed to accelerate the successful development of entrepreneurial companies through an array of business support resources and services, developed and orchestrated by incubator management and offered both in the incubator and through its network of contacts.

Sustainable Berks Business Network (SBBN). A nonprofit, member-based alliance of local organizations and individuals committed to collectively working towards a vision of a thriving and resilient Greater Reading community. Emerging from community efforts to address Reading's severe fiscal crisis and poverty levels, SBBN seeks to restructure the Greater Reading economy and grow a prosperous economic, social, and environmental regional community.

Sustainability. Sustainability is the capacity to endure. In ecology, the word describes how biological systems remain diverse and productive over time. Long-lived and healthy wetlands and forests are examples of sustainable biological systems. For humans, sustainability is the potential for long-term maintenance of well being, which has environmental, economic, and social dimensions. Sustainability economics involves ecological economics where social, cultural, health-related and monetary/financial aspects are integrated.

Sweat equity. Sweat equity is a term used to describe the contribution made to a project by people who contribute their time and effort. It can be contrasted with financial equity which is the money contributed towards the project. It is used to refer to a form of compensation by businesses to their owners or employees.

Thrifty food basket. A formula used by the Census Bureau since 1964 (with four modest revisions) that sets the poverty level at approximately three times the cost of a "thrifty food basket." The calculation was derived from spending patterns in 1955, when the average family used about one-third of its income for food.

Truancy. Any intentional unauthorized absence from compulsory schooling. The term typically describes absences caused by students of their own free will, and usually does not refer to legitimate "excused" absences, such as ones related to medical conditions.

United Community Services. A non-profit organization serving Berks County families that connects working families to community resources, helps working families with their basic needs, prepares youth for apprenticeships and other strategies to meet community, economic, educational, and social needs.

United Way. United Way of Berks County raises and distributes funds to support a network of health and human services, and working towards solutions in the areas of Education, Health, Income and Safety Net Services.

Weed and Seed. A community-based strategy sponsored by the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), Weed and Seed is multiagency approach to law enforcement, crime prevention, and community revitalization. Weed and Seed is foremost a strategy—rather than a grant program—that aims to prevent, control, and reduce violent crime, drug abuse, and gang activity in designated high-crime neighborhoods across the country.

Workforce development. Workforce development is a term used to describe employment initiative services offered by agencies and government programs. Across the United States, cities and small communities advocate workforce development because it is an essential component in creating, sustaining and retaining a viable workforce. Through workforce development, communities are able to create social and economic prosperity.

Workforce Investment Board (WIB). The purpose of the Berks County Workforce Investment Board is to identify the long-term, strategic workforce development needs of the community; propose strategies to meet those needs; set priorities; build partnerships to align resources in support of those strategies; test specific initiatives to advance those ends; and measure and evaluate results.

Working poor. Working poor describes individuals and families who maintain regular employment but remain in relative poverty due to low levels of pay and dependent expenses.

Yocum Institute for the Arts. The Yocum Institute for Arts Education is an educational facility for the arts in Wyomissing, Pennsylvania, providing performance and exhibition opportunities to students of all ages while maintaining a realistic tuition base. The Primary Stages program integrates creative drama, music, dance and visual art to help children and teens develop their creative spirit while promoting confidence in themselves and the world.

YouthBuild. YouthBuild is a youth and community development program that simultaneously addresses core issues facing low-income communities: housing, education, employment, crime prevention, and leadership development. In YouthBuild programs, low-income young people ages 16-24 work toward their GEDs or high school diplomas, learn job skills and serve their communities by building affordable housing, and transform their own lives and roles in society.

Appendix D:

CONTRIBUTORS

Participation in the Rebuilding Reading Commission is open to anyone who wishes to be involved, and to date an estimated 150 citizens have joined in the effort. They include community organizers as well as economists, attorneys, educators and architects, tenants as well as landlords and property owners, artists and business leaders, local entrepreneurs, public officials and private citizens. Many have known poverty first-hand. All are volunteers.

The list of participants on the right is far from complete. Nor does it reflect the degree of involvement or the impact of individual contributors, without whose dedication this report would not have been possible.

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